LINEBACKERS

A LINEBACKER is in the hub of action during most plays. He is the second wave of defense. Has great desire to be

part of every play. He is also the emotional leader of the defense. Great defense wins championships. Great linebacker play is essential to great defenses. Determination to be the best makes great Linebackers. Linebackers are different from other positions. It takes a special breed of cat to be a Linebacker.

Physical Qualities

Every defensive player must be able to read and react. A LB must move in a quick, decisive manner. Whether attacking straight ahead to defeat a blocker, coming in on a blitz, moving in pursuit, or dropping for pass coverage, the LB needs to move with instant quickness. Besides reaction and movement a linebacker must be able to stay on their feet, must be physical, has to love tackling, and make plays!

Remember: 1. Recognize and React

3. "Out Physical our Opponent"

2. Stay on Your Feet

4. Tackle

Would you rather a bowling ball or a baseball thrown at you? Do you think the 250lb OL cares if LB weighs 180, 200, or 220lbs? We are not to concerned about weight...we want speed, agility, reaction, nastiness.

Mental Qualities

Must be competitive. Obsessed. You must be obsessed with being the very best. Without an obsession you will never reach your Potential. We must turn potential into performance. Must have a clear knowledge of priorities: Execute and master those skills that will make you successful. Don't worry about everything. Know what is important to your position and to the defense. Last, you must be a student of the game. Know what we are doing. Know your opponent.

Remember: 1. Be Competitive

2. Be Obsessed

3. Concentrate

4. Be a Student of the Game

Stance

Do not over coach the stance. Let your players find the stance that allows them to move forward, backward, and laterally. They also need to see over the linemen and into the backfield.

<u>FEET</u>: Inside foot slightly forward. Shoulder width apart. Wide feet cause crossover and steps instead of shuffle. Weight on balls of feet with heels slightly off the ground, toes pointing to goal line.

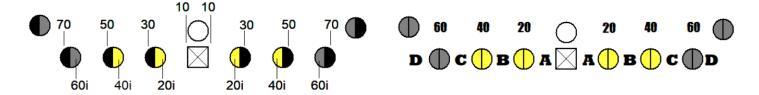
BALANCE: Distribute weight equally on the balls of both feet. Arch back, chest on thigh.

KNEES: Bend at the knees not the waist. Too much bend will not allow equal movement in both directions. Flexed at ankles.

<u>UPPER BODY</u>: Enough bend in your waist to allow placing hands on knees. Must be able to see over blockers to the backfield. Would rather stand too tall than too low from waist up

HANDS: Should dangle just above or to the inside of your knees. Elbows slightly bent and close to side. Hands should be open not clenched.

GAPS AND ALIGNMENT

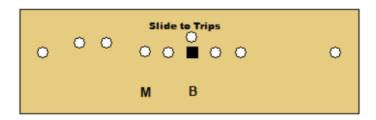


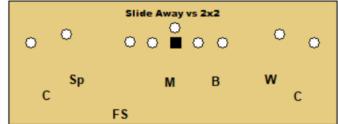
Letters do NOT tell Defensive player where to line up. They are responsibility AFTER the snap. The numbers are used to tell the player where to line up. Odd numbers are outside shade Also number holes 1,3,5,7,9 to each side to tell LB what his responsibilities are after the snap.

Alignment

Linebackers will normally align 4-5 yards deep from the LOS, aligned head up on the Guards (20 technique). In short yardage and goal line situations they will move up to the heels of the DL.

Mike Backer goes to the strength of the RUN call, usually the Tight End, but might be the back alignment. If there is not Tight End, then the Inside Backers "slide" towards trips, but away from Falcon's PASS strength call vs 2x2.





MIKE in 40-tech over tackle; BULL in 0-tech over Center.

MIKE in 0-tech over Center; BULL in 40-tch over tackle.

READS & KEYS

Two coaches can use the same scheme with identical techniques and differ radically with their keys. Half the country reads backs, the other half read linemen. What I do not believe can happen is to have your LB read both. "See a little, see a lot. See a lot, see nothing." In other words, when a LB looks at the big picture he cannot move decisively to the ball, but when he trusts a limited, true key, he can quicly be in a position to make plays.

We teach to read lineman first and then find flow. Now after film study, we may modify when we see something glaring, but this is where we start. Our LB will read the O-Line on their 1st, maybe 2nd step and then find flow. The O-Line will only determine the Linebackers first few steps and then they react to backfield flow.

Read Steps

First two steps ("read steps") are forward. Outside foot, then inside foot. They read OL on these steps and have eyes on backfield by the 2nd step.

Shuffle Steps

The fundamental movement of all Linebackers. Each play should begin with some type of shuffle step. The amount of lateral space covered by a shuffle will depend upon what type of flow develops or what your responsibility is. You do not want to cross over on the first step. Shuffle or slide. Push off the inside of the opposite foot in which you over extend yourself. Keep your shoulders square, which allows you to read the play at the point of attack. The process should be smooth and fluid. You will do some thing else following a shuffle. (Tough or Scrape)

BACKFIELD KEYS

Very hard to read Guards when they are covered up. Read backs if there is only 1 RB in backfield. Backfield keys are simple reads that are confidence builders for inexperienced players.

- When my keys comes to me, I attack my frontside gap;
- When my key goes away, I attack my backside gap;
- When my key shows pass block or pass route, I drop into my coverage rule.

LINEMEN KEYS

Keying a lineman is more complex. Rather than having three basic running back paths, a lineman may have five to eight courses. So why consider it? Linemen rarely lie. They are the truest keys. Also, stance and splits of linemen are can be great keys to what they are going to do.

With play-action pass, a running back lies. Usually linemen show pass protection. And counter & boot plays will have backfield go one direction, but pulling linemen take the LB to the correct hole. Linemen are more difficult to read, but more truthful. Our belief is to teach the harder, more true linemen reads because it easy to transition to keying a running back as an adjustment or variation. But a LB who is trained to read backfield, cannot easily start reading linemen the week you play FlexBone, Double Wing, or Wing T.

- If the blocker pulls, go in that direction immediately wile finding flow.
- If the blocker double teams, fill the open window while finding flow.
- If the blocker comes at the LB, take him on with inside shoulder while finding flow.
- If the blocker pass sets, drop into pass coverage.

TRIANGLE KEYS

Many coaches will try to get their LB to key the triangle of backs, linemen, and the ball. This is very difficult to do and I believe that the LB will move slow by trying to take in to much information at once since there are multiple keys that have to processed together in split seconds.

Back reads are very clean and easy, but deceptive. Line keys take longer to master, but are always true. In our stimulus-response system, we want our players lazer focused so they can react thru muscle memory.

We teach them to focus on the lineman on the 1st, maybe 2nd read step. Then move the eyes to the backfield.

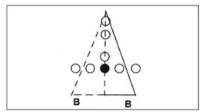
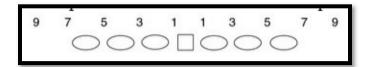


Figure 12-1. Key triangle

OL is our primary key and backfield action is our secondary key. In this figure against I-back, we should be able to see the RB over the helmet of the Guard (line-of-sight).

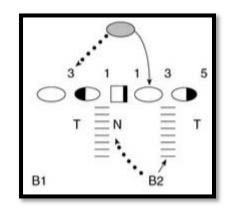
The more you rep it, the more the vision will expand.

RESPONSIBILITIES



A LB has a double-digit technique. The first digit is the PLAYSIDE gap that he is responsible for and the second digit is his BACKSIDE gap. So "31" tells the LB he has B-gap on runs at him and backside A-gap on flow away.

Outside LB only have a 1-digit responsibility.

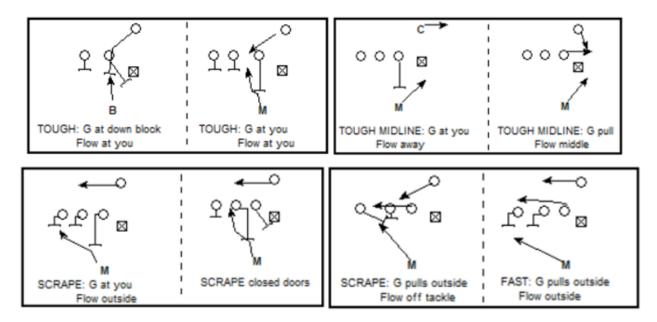


A note about flopping, which the READ & REACT system advocates. Flopping our inside linebackers, Mike & Bull, forces them to be equally effective with both sides of their body but limits the number of techniques they must learn.

LINEMEN KEYS

Everything we teach in regard to defeating the run involves THREE basic movements:

- 1) TOUGH: Take on blocker, back, or both coming right at you. Commonly called a fill or plug. A and B-gaps.
 a. TOUGH MIDLINE: Opposite A or B-gap. LB has to cross the center's midline.
- 2) SCRAPE: Move laterally, shoulders square to playside C-gap while attacking LOS. Fit outside End.
- 3) FAST: D-gap and wider. Turn hips towards sideline and run, trying to keep shoulders square.



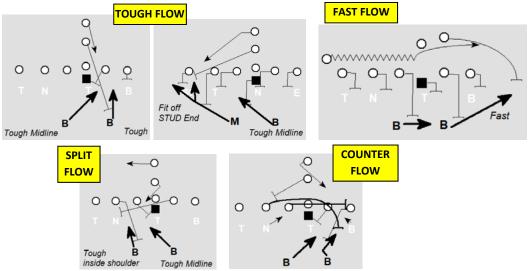
Double teams and pullers are automatic triggers. When linemen come at the LB, then must move to secondary key of backfield flow. Remember: **FILL OPEN WINDOWS, SCRAPE CLOSED DOORS.**

BACKFIELD FLOW

Basic rule of thumb is: If ball carrier is inside the tackle box, shoulders square. Leaves box, press the RB inside hip. If we can see both of the RB numbers, we shuffle flow. On any block, we cross faces – we do not come under blocks. If we see RB ribs, take off and run.

1) FULL FLOW

- a. tough flow: Inside Tackle Box (iso)
- b. fast flow: Outside Tackle Box (sweep, toss, jet)
- 2) SPLIT FLOW: One back inside tackle box, other outside. (split back veer)
- 3) COUNTER FLOW: Backs go in opposite directions.



Rep the basic plays that every offense runs so much in summer & August that players only need keys for nuances. Iso, counter, toss, trap, jet should be recognized on offenses 1st or 2nd step.

RUN TECHNIQUES

Taking On Blockers

We teach both our inside and outside Linebackers to take everything on with their inside shoulders. **CUT THE MAN IN HALF**, ripping through his armpit.

The picture on the right, the LB in red rips into V of the blockers neck with Right fist, forearm, & shoulder. Right foot in the crotch. Left foot should be slightly on the side of the blocker. The goal is to turn the blockers shoulders 90degree sideways while LB shoulders stay square. As the 3rd step (right foot) comes down, the LB moves laterally to his right so that he is on the path that the blocker came from. We call this **STEPPING ON THE PATH HE PEED ON.**



At moment of impact, the LB needs to dip squat and snap his hips to stop the blockers forward momentum.

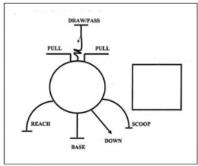


Figure 12-3. The master plan

Some times, our LB are strong enough to **SHOCK & SEPARATE.** They punch both hands under the blockers breast plate, punch with heel of hand, thumbs at 12'O Clock, elbows inside his hands. Press, Lift, & Lockout. **THROW & GO.** Meaning to throw the blocker away from the LB gap responsibility.

Although we drill eight different guard paths in summer and August, rarely does a single offense use them all. But we teach them all early on, so it that we can quickly run the blocks that our LB will see that Friday night. We begin with "clean blocks".

Seven Basic Blocks

BASE: Guard or FB coming right at him. Start with this block because we can focus on the technique of just defeating the block as described above. Attack ½ man while finding flow.

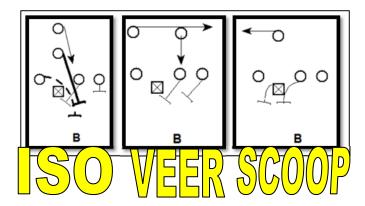
REACH: Drill daily. LB shuffles for width first, taking G on with inside foot. If ball goes inside, push or squeeze the blocker into the ball carrier. If RB bounces, simply push off the inside foot to pursue. The wider the reach block, the wider the play. Don't be two aggressive and run upfield vs reach blocks.

FRONTSIDE PULLS: Immediately scrape to C-gap or FAST FLOW to sideline. Find flow as LB moves laterally. Open window might immediately open and LB can make a negative-yardage tackle.

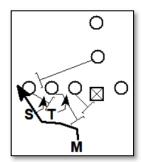
BACKSIDE PULLS: Tough-Midline into opposite A-gap. As find flow, if no RB threatens that A-gap, continue scraping, looking for an open window. He has cutback, but do not move slowly !!! Must yell "COUNTER" so other ILB can re-direct since he might have false stepped.

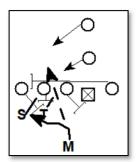
PASS OR DRAW: Yell "PASS" and keep eye on Guard for first few drop steps. If it is draw, the OL will show it.

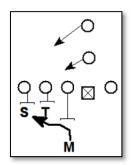
INSIDE DOWN BLOCK: Begins a series of three blocks that all look the same. A down block by the G means Iso-Trap-Veer. The Iso-Trap means attack B-gap TOUGH. The Veer block means the Tackle also blocks down and the DL should be squeezing hard, forcing the ILB to **SCRAPE A CLOSED DOOR.** The other time a G will down block is when he is actually "SCOOPING" because the flow is going away. The ILB should see flow away on his 2nd step as his eyes move from the Guard to the Backfield.



SCRAPE DOWN BLOCK: By being in a 6-4-0-4 D-Line alignment, it is really hard for the defense to run off tackle.

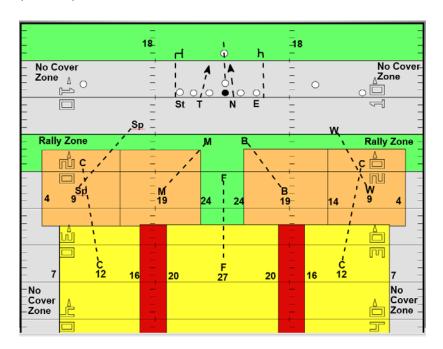






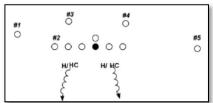
PASS DEFENSE

In normal zone coverage, a defender will drop to spots on the field, which is very easy to teach and something I recommend during the first year of taking over an awful program. Spot dropping means turning 45° and running to a spot at 12yds and then turning around to find a receiver. When pattern reading, the width and drop will vary based on the receiver's routes, so in theory, the defender is never "guarding grass." First basic rule: ILB are responsible for routes inside the tackle box (TE to TE). Next Rule: Make QB throw over LB hands.



Hook / Curl Dropper

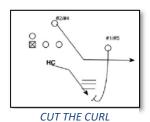
Linebacker takes a 45° angle aiming 8-12 yards inside the ORIGINAL alignment of the #2, #3, and #4 receivers. As he drops, his head is on a swivel because the width and depth will adjust based on the route.

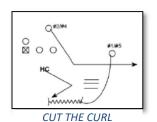


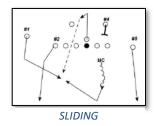
Head on a swivel does NOT mean look back at QB! It means find the receiver and then run at him. Do not look back at the QB until LB is arm distance away from receiver.

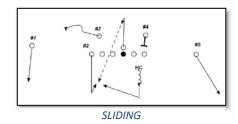
Something Goes Out, Something Is Coming In.

If the receiver runs a route towards the sideline, the LB should "cut" to the receiver breaking in. Turn back to QB and quickly get into the throwing lane, not looking at QB until arms distance from receiver. If the LB key receiver (RB or TE) blocks, read the QB and "slide" to any receiver that the QB is looking at.

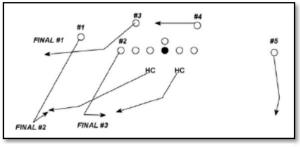


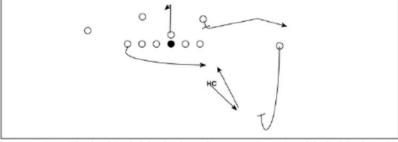






A "PUSH" call is made by a LB telling the adjacent defender to push past the coverage towards the next threat.





PUSH

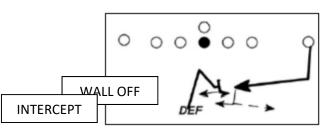
Diagram 3-13. The hook/curl defender has taken away the curl and looked back to the quarterback. His body took away the curl; his eyes will help on the crosser.

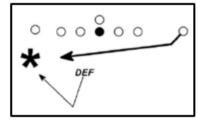
Covering Crossers

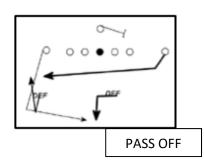
The most difficult thing is how to handle crossing receivers. Should the defender run across the field with them or try to pass the receiver off to the next defender? What if one defender passes off the receiver but the adjacent defender does not hear the call or know he now has the receiver? What if the ILB is running across the field with a crosser and another crosser comes at him?

Walling / Intercept / Pass Off Crossers

The 1st thing is to not let crossers go by. LB turns his body into the receiver, forcing him to go "over the top". If the receiver continues to cross, the LB must turn and run with him after forcing the receiver over the top.



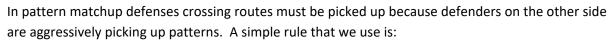


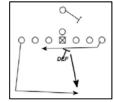


Problems With Crossers

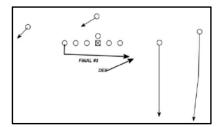
No matter how a crosser is picked up in a zone, a problem will exist:

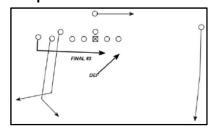
- WALLING OFF: Walling off a quick receiver is hard because once the WR goes over top and LB runs with him.
- INTERSECTING: Very tough to do if receiver is running at full speed.
- PASSING OFF: 1st) defender to pass off to must be available. 2nd) crossing receiver may stop & sit in a zone.
- HIGH/LOW: shallow crosser lets LB wall him so that deep crosser comes open.

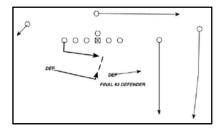




The Defender Responsible for #3 Takes Shallow Crossers.







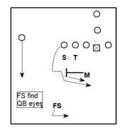
Covering Seams

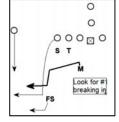
Seam routes can hurt defense in a "big way" and pattern reading stops that by putting defenders on the seam route with other defenders picking up shallow crossers. The LB carrying the seam must drive hard for the upfield shoulder of the receiver, turned into the receiver, and putting his hands up when 0 the receiver puts his hands up.

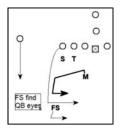
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Covering Tight Ends

Our Mike LB takes a 45° angle to the TE and drives his inside hip. If he goes vertical, pass him off to the safety at 10 yds and take anther 45° drop to the #1 receiver. If TE runs an arrow (out under 5yds), drop to #1 to take away curl-dig.







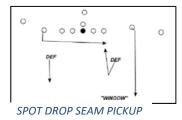
If #2 runs a shallow cross

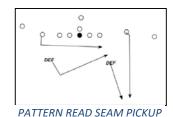
If #2 runs 10yd out.

If #2 runs a 8-12yd dig.

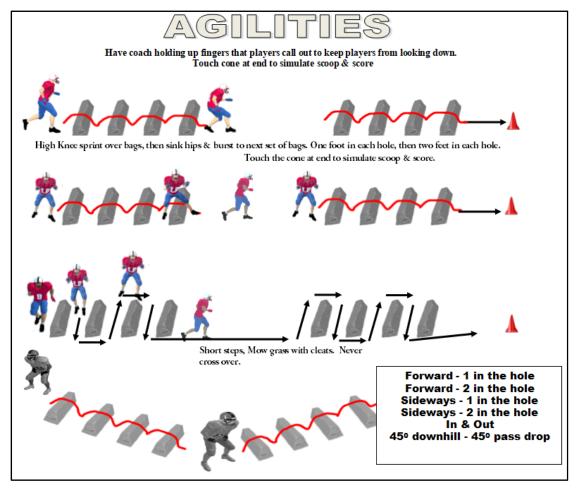
Blitzing

- Butt-Pull Bull Rush move. Pull if blocker leans forward.
- Swat-Swim. Start like bull rush. Fake opposite direction want to go, then club the elbow with arm in direction want to go, bringing other arm over earhole of blocker. Shoot hip. Bring swim arm elbow down into the middle of the blocker's back.
- Dip and Rip: arm through the rib cage, exploding up thru armpit of blocker. Punch the sky and kiss the bicep.



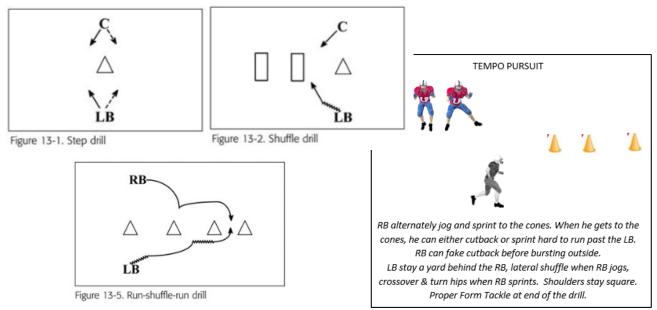


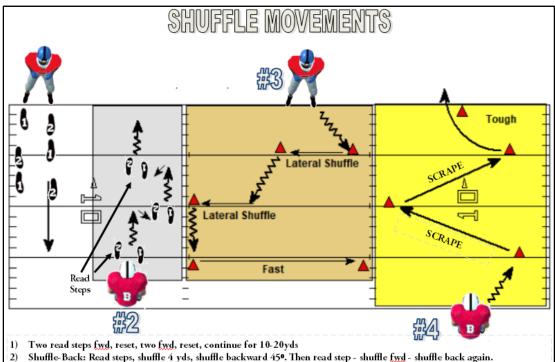
DRILLS



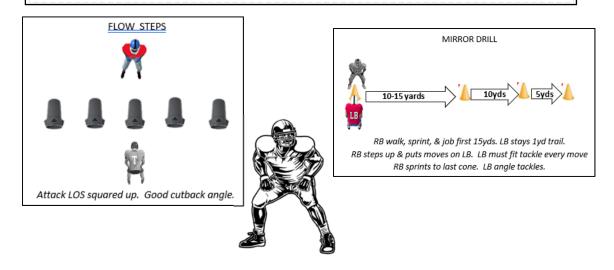
MOVEMENT DRILLS: Spring & summer emphasis on <u>Slow Shuffle</u>. Emphasizing good body position. Always freeze at end of every drill. <u>Shuffle-ReDirect</u>. <u>Lateral Run</u>. Shoulders square, inside-out leverage. Do not lower hips to change directions.

In season we do all 3 of these drills in 2 minutes, called THE HUSTLE drill. Also work hip openers.

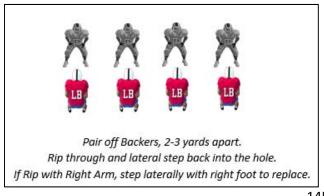


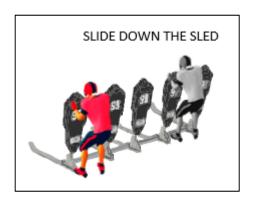


- Shuffle-Redirect: Shuffle 45°, then lateral for 5yds. Read step, 45° shuffle, lateral shuffle. Shuffle Fxxd, Fast Flow. 4) Shuffle Combo Drill.

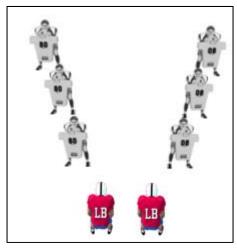


DEFEAT BLOCKERS

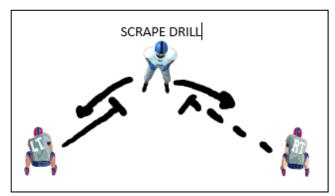




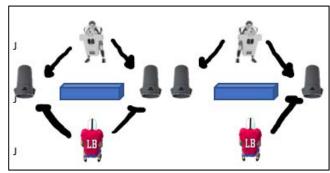
MACHINE GUN DRILL



Blockers attack LB who is running at them, RIPPING thru with inside arm

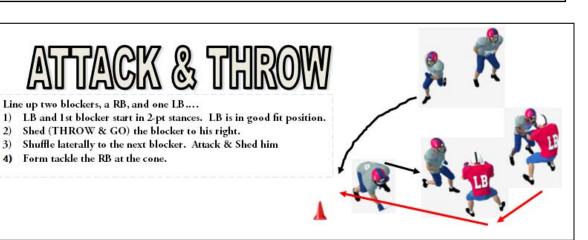


LB scrapes to C-gap, RIPPING thru the Offensive Tackles block with inside arm



LB scrapes to C-gap, RIPPING thru the Lead Running Backs Block

Simulate LINEMEN blocking Linebacker. Don't rip around, Attack Half-A-Man with violent forearm that splits the numbers. LB right shoulder pad on Blockers right shoulder pad and vice versa. Always rip over top of side blockers. Straight ahead depends on assignment. 3 MAN LEAD-THROW Simulate RUNNING BACKS blocking LB. Back up blockers 5 yards. Start with each side Back. 2-hand shiver, Lift-Lock-Throw & Go. When blocker in front of LB comes forward, attack with shoulder and 2-hand shiver. Have to push straight ahead lead blockers backwards across LOS.



PASS DROPS



45° <u>drop</u> to middle cone, flip hips, 45° drop to outer cone #2. Face other direction and drop back to middle cone and then Cone #1. Another LB is dropping to cones #3 and #4 at same time.

Add more cones: Drops should be 5-10yds

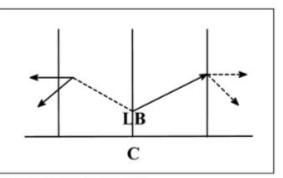
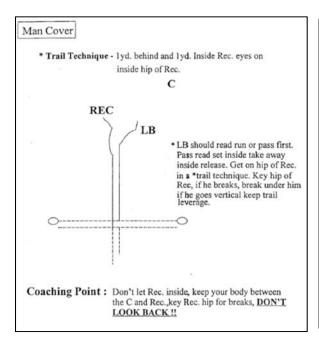
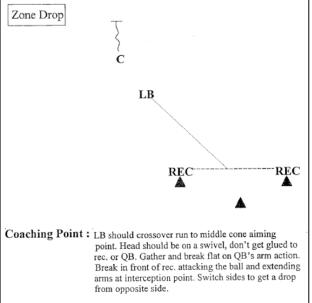


Figure 13-4. Angle drop drill





We use drills to simulate *play-action passes* (Figure 13-7). We align the linebacker at his proper depth. We make him cover his run responsibility to his gap and retreat to his coverage zone. The linebacker bursts forward and shuffles before he recognizes the pass. He has to get to his spot drop, see the quarterback, and break on the ball.

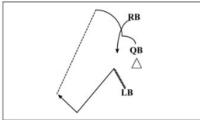
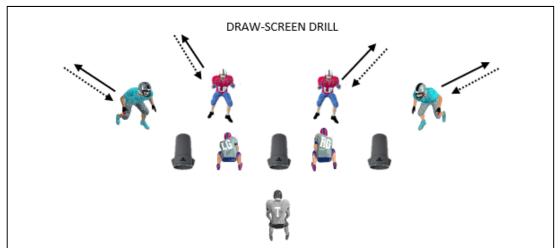


Figure 13-7. Play-action pass drill

MAN TO MAN Coaching Pointers: · Read an offensive lineman, next to the Purpose: tight end or in front of the back, to make sure it's a pass. · To teach the techniques for man-to-· When you know it's a pass, get to man coverage on backs and tight ends. your man as fast as possible. · Move to him on a straight line, laterally if necessary, to get inside leverage. · Force him to take an outside path and stay on his shoulder, especially in the end zone. There is no such thing as a cushion in the end zone! Set-up and Instructions:

Position a linebacker in his normal relationship with a tight end or a running back as illustrated. Use extra linebackers as offensive personnel but be sure to alternate them so all the linebackers get three or four repetitions of man-to-man coverage. On your cadence, have the receiver run a predetermined route. Have the receivers try to run "in" routes: swing sharps, slants, square ins, posts. Make sure the linebackers secure inside leverage. Or have the receivers run "out" routes: swing wides, slant outs, square outs, flags. Make sure the linebackers get to the receiver quickly and stay on the outside or upfield shoulder, focusing on the receiver until he reaches for the ball.

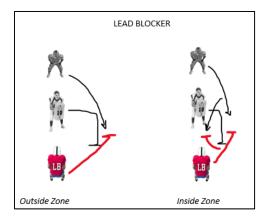


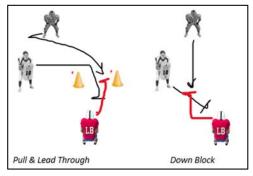
Coach plays QB. Simulate draw handoff during drop back or throwing screen towards either sideline.

Linebackers re-trace their steps on <u>draw; Close</u> in on screen from inside-out.

Extra Linebackers should play RB and both Guard positions to make realistic.

TACKLING







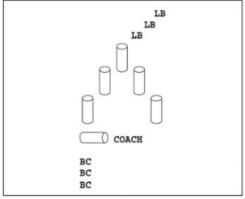
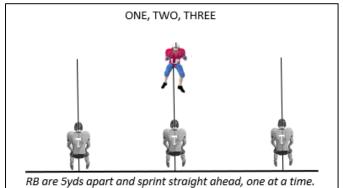


Figure 16-2. Downhill agility drill-rip angle tackle



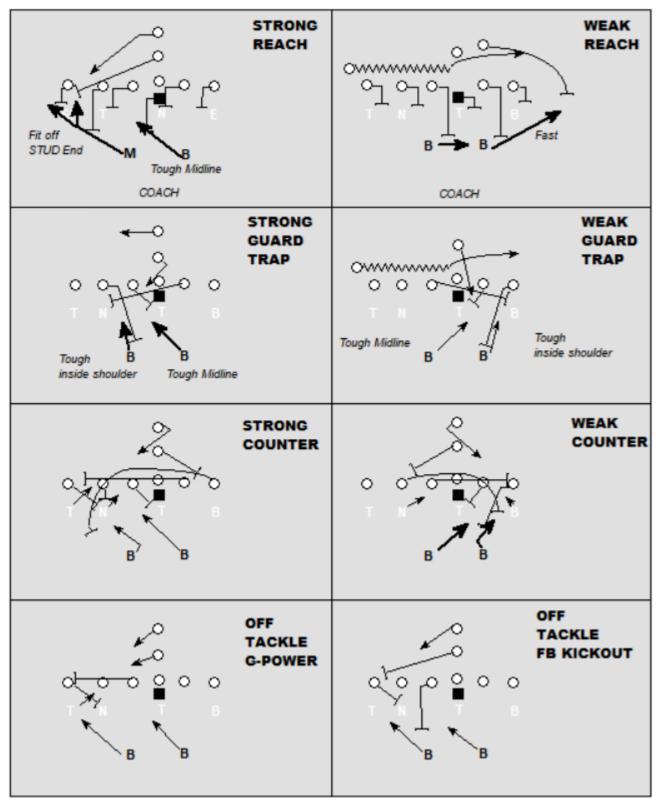
RB are 5yds apart and sprint straight ahead, one at a time.
RB on sides can cutback, middle RB can put open field move.
LB is 5-7yds away, form tackles RB, go back to spot to tackle the next RB.

2 v 1 REACTION Don't need the TE for this drill. \boxtimes TOUGH: G at down block TOUGH: G at you TOUGH: G at you TOUGH: G at down block Flow at you Flow at you Flow at you Flow at you TOUGH MIDLINE: G at you TOUGH MIDLINE: G pull TOUGH MIDLINE: G at you TOUGH MIDLINE: G pull Flow middle Flow away Flow away Flow middle SCRAPE closed doors SCRAPE closed doors SCRAPE: G at you SCRAPE: G at you Flow outside Flow outside SCRAPE: G pulls outside FAST: G pulls outside SCRAPE: G pulls outside FAST: G pulls outside Flow outside Flow outside Flow off tackle Flow off tackle OPTION(dive away): OPTION(dive away): OPTION(dive at you): OPTION(dive at you): dictate QB read with DL has QB Play Dive to QB Play Dive to QB call so ILB can "cheat for success"

6 vs 2 FULL LINE

LB

Don't need the TE for this drill.



6 vs 2 FULL LINE



Don't need the TE for this drill. STRONG WEAK ISO ISO Tough strong-A/cutback Tough Tough Midline Dictate Keep Dictate Handoff GUN GUN ZONE ZONE READ READ В MIKE has RB BULL has QB BULL has RB MIKE has RB WEAK STRONG OPTION OPTION DROP SPRINT BACK PASS We call this a SPRINT blitz. OLB cannot come up