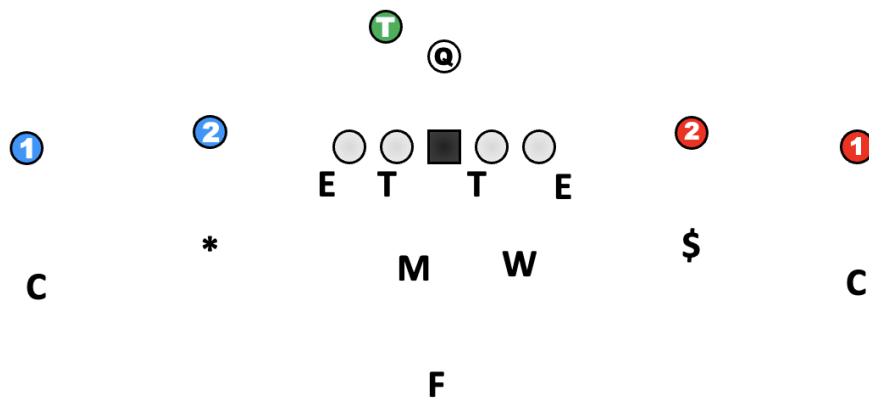


No defensive system fails because of scheme alone. Most fail because the scheme does not match the players running it, or coaches try and force the proverbial “Round peg in a Square hole” and run a defense that they don’t have the proper personnel to run.

The 4-2-5 defense is at its best when it is personnel flexible. You do not need perfect players—you need players who understand their role, are coachable and are coached to their strengths.

This chapter defines what each position needs to do, not what they must look like. Before we get started, lets look at what a typical 4-2-5 with a single high safety would look like. Don’t worry about where and what alignment the players are in for now – just use the below diagram as a starting point for how the defense would align.



*Figure 3.1 – Base alignment of a 4-2-5 with a single high safety.*

### Defensive Line

The defensive line sets the tone for the entire defense. In the 4-2-5, the line must be disciplined first and disruptive second. Like every other position on the defense though, being disciplined and doing your job and not trying to make plays all over the field makes the defense that much better.

## **Defensive Ends**

### Primary Traits

- Ability to set an edge
- Discipline with eyes and hands
- Willing tackler
- Having speed is an added benefit

### Coaching Point

You do not need edge rushers who win one-on-one every snap. You need ends who:

- Consistently Keep leverage
- Control their gap
- Collapse space
- Are able to read and react to the block in front of them

Ends must understand that their job is to force the ball to help, not chase sacks on every play.

## **Defensive Tackles**

### Primary Traits

- Toughness
- Keep and Utilize Pad level
- Ability to anchor & fight double teams

### Coaching Point

Interior defenders must be coached to play with patience and power. Penetration is valuable, but losing your gap is not. One of the biggest mistakes that DT's make in the 4-2-5 is losing control of their gap – since it is a gap control/assignment defense, if DT's lose their gaps, big holes open up resulting in big plays.

A high school defensive tackle who understands leverage and hand placement can dominate without elite size.

### **Linebackers**

The two inside linebackers are the heartbeat of the defense. They must see the game clearly and communicate consistently.

### **Mike Linebacker**

#### Primary Traits

- Football intelligence
- Reliable tackler
- Leadership

#### Role Definition

The Mike is the traffic cop of the defense. He must:

- Align the front
- Communicate adjustments, stunts, blitzes, etc.
- Fit downhill with confidence

Speed is helpful. Awareness is mandatory.

## **Will Linebacker**

### Primary Traits

- Range
- Open-field tackling
- Ability to play in space

### Role Definition

The Will must be able to:

- Flow laterally
- Clean up runs
- Handle backs in coverage

This player often makes the defense look fast.

## **Nickel/Overhangs**

Some people use a single “overhang” or “down” safety, others use two of them almost like outside linebackers in a 4-4 with a single high safety. Whichever path you decide to go, usually based on personnel, these overhang defenders are probably the most important positions in the 4-2-5.

Personally, I like to use 2 down safeties but I will usually line one of them back to give a two high look. (I usually play the boundary overhang back) But again, however you decide to play the defense, these two need to be studs in your defense.

If you get this position right, the defense works.

### Primary Traits

- Versatility
- Physicality
- Football IQ

### Role Definition

The overhang defenders must be able to:

- Fit the run like a linebacker
- Cover like a defensive back
- Communicate with both the box and the secondary
- Play like a DE in certain formations

This is not a “tweener” position—it is a featured role.

### Coaching Reality

If you don't have two perfect overhangs, go with one and use a 2-high safety system and simplify their rules. Do not overload him with checks.

## **Free Safety**

### Primary Traits

- Field awareness
- Range
- Calm decision-making
- Clear understanding of coverages

## Role Definition

The free safety is the eraser. He cleans up mistakes and keeps explosive plays from happening. In many instances he will be one of your leading tacklers as you need him to run the alleys and help out in the run game. He also needs to be a solid cover guy who can help out in different coverages outside his normal role.

## **Cornerbacks**

Cornerbacks must trust their technique and understand leverage.

## Primary Traits

- Confidence
- Eye discipline
- Willingness to tackle
- Have a short term memory

## Coaching Point

At the High School level, corners do not need to be lockdown defenders. They need to:

- Keep proper leverage based on coverage
- Disrupt timing
- Tackle in space

Fear is more damaging than lack of speed. In many instances we would rather the CBs stay in coverage as long as possible and tell them they can “be late to run” – meaning if our overhang defenders do their jobs, the CBs are almost a last line of defense to help us out from run support.

## **Personnel Reality - “What if I don’t have the right guys”?**

Like any system you deploy, you will rarely have ideal body types at every position. The solution is not to abandon the system, rather adjust your teaching.

Examples:

- Smaller defensive line → emphasize technique and movement
- Slower linebackers → simplify reads to maximize their speed
- Limited secondary → reduce coverage variety

Your defense must serve the players, not the other way around.

## **Cross Training and Depth**

We’ve all been there - in-season injuries. Like death and taxes, they are inevitable and are the destroyers of the best made plans. Like Mike Tyson once said “everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face”. Sometimes injuries to your best players in key positions will come up and punch you in the face when you least expect it. There is no solution, only thing you can do is cross-train players whenever possible to play other positions - it’s the next man up philosophy.

Best practices: (Usually during scout defense sessions or early in season)

- Train your CBs to play FS if you play a single high scheme
- Train your Nickel/Star to play SS if you play a two high scheme
- Train the Will to play overhang

Depth is built through preparation, not hope.

## **Final Thoughts on Personnel**

When players understand their role and believe in it and see the importance of doing their job as part of the overall system ... your defense becomes fast, physical, and confident—regardless of roster limitations.