

Coverage busts lose games.

At the High School level, most coverage breakdowns are not caused by poor athleticism—they are caused by unclear rules and players trying to do too much. I've always found it best to start practice #1 learning one coverage and then working that coverage daily for a few weeks until the defense has it down pat. This coverage needs to become the “comfortable” coverage whereby we can always rely on it at any time during the game and we know the players understand the coverage and their rules. What coverage that is, that's up to you. But for the sake of this ebook, we'll discuss Cover 3 and Quarters.

These two coverages allow the defense to:

- Protect against explosive plays
- Support the run
- Handle spread concepts
- Reduce communication errors as they will become our comfort zones, so to speak.

### **Coverage Philosophy**

Our coverage philosophy is built on a few basic principles:

1. Don't get beat deep
2. Eliminate free releases
3. Tie coverage to run fits
4. Use rules, not memorization
5. Adjust leverage, not structure

We do not chase route combinations. If we play our rules, the route combinations should be handled.

### **Why Cover-3 and Quarters?**

These two coverages:

- Complement each other
- Use similar alignment and technique
- Allow smooth transitions into pressure
- Allow us to easily show one and play the other to confuse QBs

### **Cover-3 Structure**

Cover 3 gives the defense:

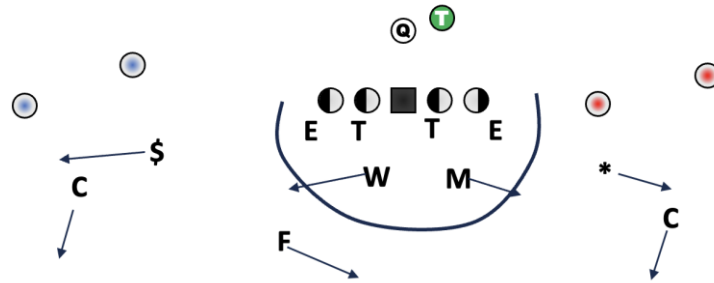
- Three deep defenders
- Four underneath defenders
- Strong run support

### **Deep Coverage**

- Corners: Deep outside thirds
- Free Safety: Deep middle third

### **Underneath Coverage**

- Overhangs work curl to flats
- Linebackers work the hook to curl zones



**Figure 7.1 - Cover 3 Base Structure – 2x2 Formation**

*(Standard 3 deep 4 under coverage zones. Run reads/fits don't change as the front 6 under the umbrella still have to read run first, then push out to their coverage responsibilities on a pass read.)*

## Cover-3 Rules by Position

### Corners

One of the things I've always done with my CBs is line them up splitting the #1 and #2 WRs. High School players have not played a lot of zone coverage before they get to varsity, so their tendency is to line up directly over the #1 WR and cover them in man, even though they are in zone. What happens is the offense runs some sort of smash concept where #2 runs a deep corner while #1 runs an in breaking route or deep out and the CB sits on the #1 WR and we have a wide open corner route. We try and break the "man" thought process with them by lining them up between WRs to help them understand their job.

- Inside leverage (Split the 1 & 2 WR's)
- Bail technique
- Do not get beat deep
- Responsible for deep outside 1/3rd

### Free Safety

- Middle of the field
- Read QB drop

- Overlap vertical routes
- Responsible for middle 1/3rd

### Overhangs

- Curl/flat
- Trigger on run with outside leverage – force player
- No free routes – must re-route #2 WR

### Linebackers

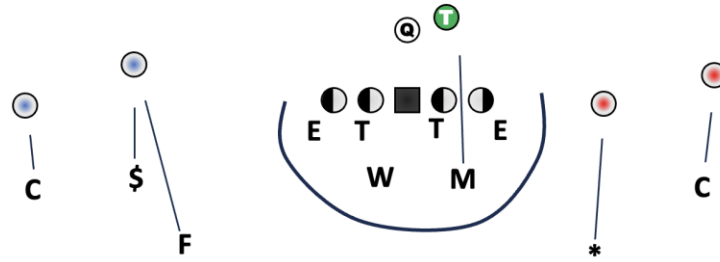
- Hook/curl zones
- Read run first
- Wall crossers without chasing

## **Basic Quarters Structure**

Quarters is a match coverage built to handle vertical threats and RPOs and it has different derivatives that you can play to expand the coverage. (We'll talk about those in our coverage book). For the sake of this ebook, we will just give a basic introduction to quarters.

### **Philosophy**

- Four deep defenders
- Match routes, not areas
- Safeties are run defenders



**Figure 7.2 - Quarters Coverage – 2x2 Formation**

*(Responsibilities and reads represented by the lines. Linebackers are in the umbrella, reading run first.)*

### Quarters Rules by Position

For the sake of any coverage where we are reading routes, it's important to ensure you define what a "vertical" route is and when the defense should declare a route vertical. (Completely arbitrary and up to the individual team to define)

### Corners

- Read #1
- #1 goes vertical = you own #1
- If #1 runs a quick under route = let WR go and look for crosser coming back and own deep  $\frac{1}{4}$
- If #1 runs a quick out, stay on top

### Safeties

- Read #2
- Vertical = carry
- Under = fit run
- Out = stay deep  $\frac{1}{4}$  and look for routes

## **Overhang**

- Match #2 out
- Fit run fast
- Handle bubble/screen
- Must re-route #2

## **Linebackers**

- Match #3 vertical
- Hook eyes on QB
- Expand with flow

We'll discuss handling 3x1 and other formations with quarters in our coverage book in depth.

## **Motion Rules**

Motion does not change the call—it changes the picture.

## **Rules**

- Shallow motion → bump
- Fast motion → communicate
- Motion across formation → pass it off

No chasing. No panic.

## **Teaching Coverage**

Best teaching sequence:

I've found it best to teach cover 3 first. It's an easy coverage and allows players to understand the concept of zones, not chasing routes, etc.

1. Walkthrough with cones – make sure players understand the concept of zones that they own.
2. Route-on-air – see routes stressing the zones and make sure they understand we can't cover everything and where the weak parts of the zone are
3. Half-speed team
4. Full-speed reps

### **Common Coverage Mistakes**

- Corners peeking inside
- Safeties triggering too early
- Overhangs drifting too wide
- Linebackers chasing ghosts
- Players following routes (playing man instead of zone)

### **Final Thoughts on Coverage**

Coverage is about trust.

When players trust:

- The structure
- The help
- The rules

They play fast and confident.

Cover 3 and Quarters are not flashy—but they win games when combined with solid run fits up front.