

THE ART OF PLAYING

Wide Receiver



How to dominate your opponent!

Eric Van Tassel with **MyFootballMentor**

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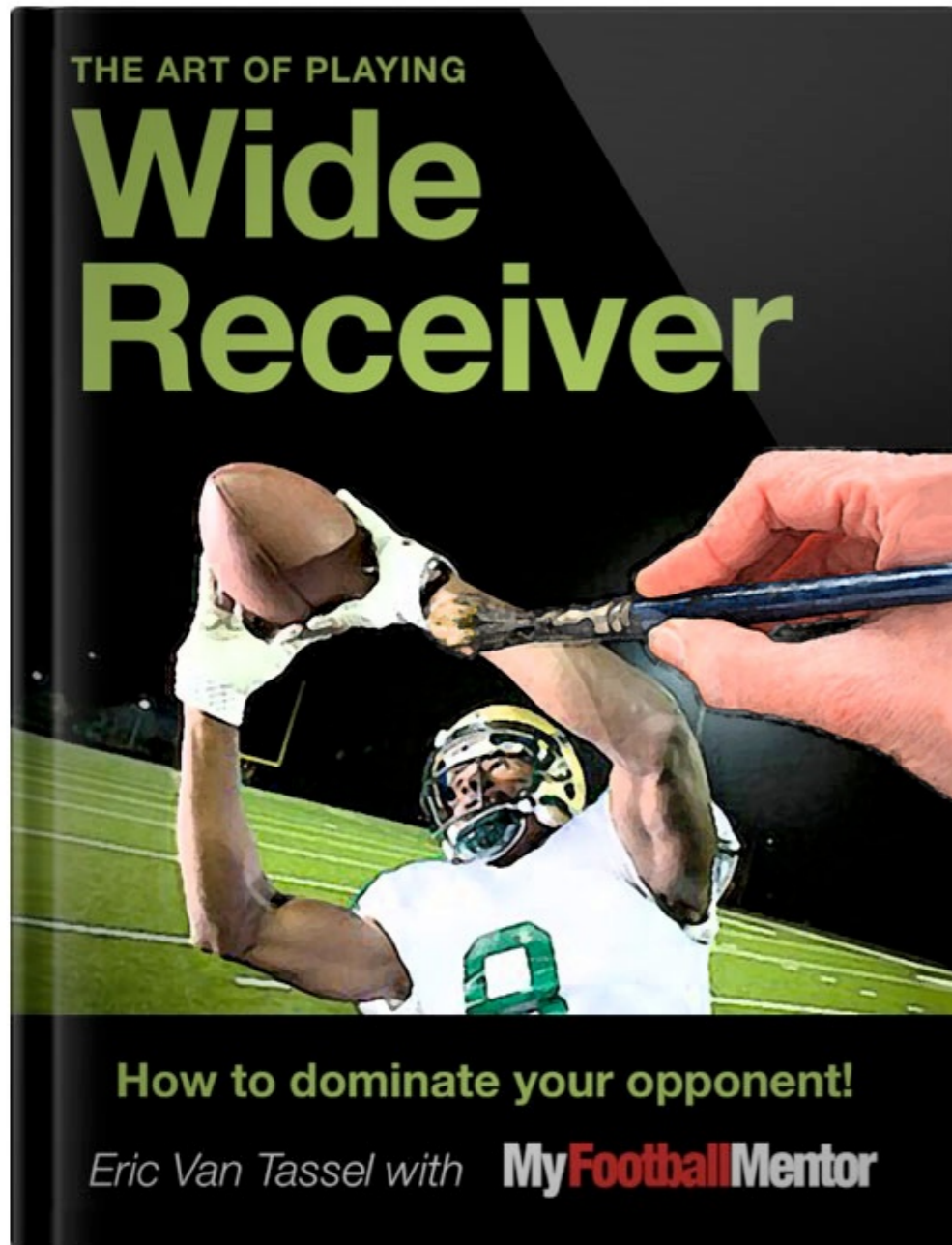
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Coach Van Tassel is considered one the most complete receiver coaches in the country. Whether you are at the High School or College level, Coach Van Tassel's 20 plus years of experience and passion for teaching can help you take your game to exciting new levels. From high school to the professional level, Coach Van Tassel has always been recognized as a diligent technician and teacher of fundamentals for the Wide Receiver position in the

sport of football. He played wide receiver collegiately and professionally so he understands all the nuances of the position. His love for teaching kids and helping them reach their goals is evidenced by the extraordinary information you will find available in this one of a kind book!

Special Thanks to two people who made this book possible.



Long time friend Terry Vaughn demonstrates professional techniques on the training videos featured in this book. Terry attended Oceanside HS and was then recruited to University of Arizona where he was first true freshman to start for a Pac 12 school. In November 2006, Terry Vaughn was voted one of the CFL's **Top 50 players of the league's** modern era by Canadian sports network. To view his video highlights [click here](#).



Brad DeHaven is the media and content production manager at MyFootballMentor.com. He helped in all phases of this book including shooting video, post editing, graphic design, and writing. Brad has written two best selling books of his own, selling over 250,000 copies of his first book, 'The Currency of the Future.' As a speaker, Brad has inspired over 1 million people on 4 continents.

intro video

Watch Introduction Video To This eBook



All of the videos throughout this eBook are displayed identical to above with a red bold text title link above and a snapshot of the video below. Click on the red text video link to watch each video.

Dedication



This book is dedicated to all the receivers I've coached who have excelled as athletes but more so as grown men after their endeavors in football, specifically my three favorites, PJ, Seneca, and Brian. I would also like to make a special dedication to my brother, Chris Van Tassel, who has overcome more odds than any athlete I've coached as he has been winning the battle with Leukemia for the past 15 years! I would like to ask all who can to donate to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society at www.lls.org.

Thank you!



The Art of Playing Receiver

The most appealing aspect of playing receiver in the sport of football is that it's a position where an abundance of creativity can be used. Along with work-ethic, it is creativity that separates the great receivers from the average one's.



The Art of Playing Wide Receiver

CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction
2. Terms and Definitions
3. Knowledge Breeds Confidence

The Art of Playing Wide Receiver

The most appealing aspect of playing receiver in the sport of football is that it's a position where an abundance of creativity can be used. Along with work-ethic, it is creativity that separates the great receivers from the average one's. There are plenty of books, manuals, documents and YouTube videos about how to play the position, however, the one you hold in your hands now is by far the best teaching tool available today. This book is a combination of words, photos, illustrations and videos that will teach you the unique approach I use to develop dominating receivers!

This book is not a library of alignments, schemes, or drills although I will detail a few drills. If you are a player, these are all things you will learn from your coach because each football program will vary. As a player, what I teach in this book will give you a big edge on your competition. You will learn some of the tools and strategies that make great receivers great!

If you are a coach, I believe I can help you expand and strengthen what you already teach your players. What you will learn, whether you are a player or a coach, is **the *ART of the position!*** I define this as how to run a pass route creatively and how to beat the defender so badly that by the end of the day he wishes he would have taken up the sport of tennis! I am not here to teach you how

to drive a car for the first time, I am going to teach you how to drive a race car and how to win the Indianapolis 500!

By nature, I have always been good at things that require a creative flare such as art and music. I haven't spent every minute of my life consumed by the sport of football. I love to draw, to write, and I taught myself how to play an instrument at a very young age. I still love to partake in these hobbies. As a receiver, playing a musical instrument probably helped me with my ability to catch the football due to the dexterity and hand coordination I developed. So, in the spirit of what we are about to learn, take up the guitar or saxophone in your spare time!



With an artistic nature, I approached playing the position of receiver from a very creative viewpoint. This is what I loved about the position, the ability to “free-lance” within the context of the assignment. This means that, as long as I got from point A to point B when I was suppose to (the time at which the ball arrived), I could do whatever I wanted to make the defender look completely foolish! I have to admit, I enjoyed making my opponent look foolish! I always got a kick out of causing a guy to fall to the ground or turning him in the opposite direction of where I was going. I wasn't looking to just get open, I was looking to get open by such a wide margin that it would make the defender look like he didn't even belong out there! That was my competitive drive but there is a benefit to this as well. The wider the margin you get open by, the more you increase your QB's margin of error.

Yes, we will talk about all the fundamental aspects of playing wide receiver that you must know but there is a good chance we will also discuss things that you have probably never been taught before. That's a good thing because if you are able to perform skills on the field that are unique, your opponent won't have an answer for them. I can say for sure that you will learn different aspects of the position because I've taught these techniques at the professional level and, even at that level, my players were unfamiliar with some of these techniques. I have always tried to be innovative versus simply teaching what has been taught for the last 50 years in the sport of football. This is a constant

process for me as there isn't a year that goes by that I don't try to learn or create something new that I can pass on to my players.



By the way, just to cover the formalities, ***here's what Wikipedia has to say about positions that catch a football, "The wide receiver's principle role is to catch passes from the quarterback. On passing plays, the receiver attempts to avoid, outmaneuver, or simply outrun defenders (typically cornerbacks and/or safeties) in the area of his pass route. If the receiver becomes open, or has an unobstructed path to the destination of a catch, he may then become the***

quarterback's target. Once a pass is thrown in his direction, the receiver's goal is to first catch the ball and then attempt to run downfield. Some receivers are perceived as a deep threat because of their flat-out speed, while others may be possession receivers known for not dropping passes, running crossing routes across the middle of the field, and generally, converting third down situations. A receiver's height and weight also contribute to his expected role; tall in height and light in weight are advantages at the receiver position."

Okay, that's the "internet's" definition of receiver, and it's all good, but you and I can discover a level of the position that will transcend height, weight, and speed. In fact, by the time you get done learning everything I will teach you in this book you will be so energized to get back out on the field (whether as a coach or a player) and apply everything that the season won't come soon enough for you! So, get ready for the ride because I am about to open your eyes to The Art of Playing Wide Receiver!

Terms

The following are terms (and the definitions of these terms) that you will see me use throughout this book so be sure to refer back to them as you read:

Vertical- Attacking the length of the football field

Horizontal- Attacking the width of the football field

Down-Field- Towards the goal line

Break point- Point where the route changes direction

1st Phase- First part of a pass route from the line of scrimmage to the first break point

Top of the Route- Portion of the route between the first and second phases

2nd Phase- Part of a pass route after the first break point to when the ball is thrown

3rd Phase- The catch and run

Soft Coverage- Defender 6 to 10 yards off the line of scrimmage

Press Coverage- Defender right at the line of scrimmage

Cushion- Space between the receiver and defender

Stacking- Putting a defender in a trail position

1st Level- At the line of scrimmage

2nd Level- Linebacker depth

3rd level- Safety depth

Re-route- A technique by the defender to force a receiver off his line on a pass route

Stemming- Attacking the defender with angles

Stop Routes- Routes such as the hitch, curl, and comeback. Vertical push to dead stop

Set-Up Steps- The last three steps of a stop route

Boundary- Short side of field relative to a formation. Closest to the sideline.

Field- Wide side of field relative to a formation. Furthest from the sideline.

High and Tight- Correct technique to carry a football. see “5 points of pressure” below.

5 points of pressure- Points of pressure of the (1) The hand around the ball, i.e. “the claw”, (2) The forearm pressed firmly against exterior of the ball, (3) The bicep over the inside tip of the ball, (4) Carry ball across the chest, (5) The pointer finger over the tip of the football. **See video explanation.**

Two Way Go- A position where the receiver can attack either the left or right side of a defender.

Slip and Slide- Slipping the inside hip of a Cover 2 funnel corner and sliding into the hole under the safety.



Knowledge Breeds Confidence

Let me pose this scenario to you. You get to the line of scrimmage and get into your stance. You quickly scan the defense and then look across at the guy covering you. You feel the corners of your mouth start to form a grin as you realize that there is nothing that he can do to stop you! Zone coverage, man coverage...it doesn't matter because you know exactly what to do against anything the defense throws at you. Hmm, the corner is lined up about six yards off you and about one yard inside. The safety is on the other side of the field where there are three

receivers in the formation. You are the weak-side receiver. "Cool, this guy is trying to take away my inside because he doesn't have any safety help!" You chuckle to yourself because you know that doesn't matter, you know exactly what you have to do if you need to get inside of him. You look down the line of scrimmage...set...hut, hut...you are off and running!



As a receiver, is this how you feel when you get to the line of scrimmage or are you apprehensive because you're not sure what you are seeing by the defense or you aren't exactly sure how to counter the technique by the defender covering you? Well, if you are the guy who is apprehensive, after reading this book you will become the guy who knows exactly what to do against any type of defensive coverage or any technique thrown at you by the guy who tries to cover you!

Knowledge breeds confidence in any endeavor you partake in, whether it's playing wide receiver at the high school level or executing responsibilities as the CEO of a multi-million dollar corporation. ***Without the knowledge of how to do your job you will always lack the confidence necessary to perform your job at a high level.*** Welcome to the Art of Playing Wide Receiver as I am going to teach you how to be the CEO of your football world!

Let's get started :-)



Bio- Mechanics

Playing receiver requires an abundance of athleticism but, more than anything, it requires a tremendous amount of discipline pertaining to the technical aspects of the position. As a coach I would rather work with a player who understands how to be a great tactician and move his body properly versus a player who relies solely on physical strength and speed. After all, you could be the fastest player on the field but if you can't get open or catch the ball then you won't be an asset to your team!



The Bio-Mechanics of Playing Receiver

CHAPTER 2

1. The Feet
2. The Cleats
3. Stance
4. Plant Foot
5. Pivot Plant Foot Technique
6. The Feet Relative to Balance
7. The Hips and Shoulders
8. The Eyes and Head
9. Improving Your Bio-Mechanics
10. Quiz

The Bio-Mechanics of Playing Receiver

If you want to excel as a receiver you have to understand how to use the different parts of your body necessary to perform all of the techniques associated with the position. Understanding bio-mechanics (how the different parts of your body move), will help you understand the role that each body part plays in executing a technique.

Playing receiver requires an abundance of athleticism but, more than anything, it requires a tremendous amount of discipline pertaining to the technical aspects of the position. As a coach I would rather work with a player who understands how to be a great tactician and move his body properly versus a player who relies solely on physical strength and speed. After all, you could be the fastest player on the field but if you can't get open or catch the ball then you won't be an asset to your team!

The Feet

As with every position in football, to be successful at wider receiver you must have good feet. What you are able to do with your body on a football field is directly related to your footwork.

Cleats

The type of cleats you choose are the most important pieces of equipment for a wide receiver and they can greatly effect your movement bio-mechanics. I'll never forget my college coach yelling at me after I slipped and fell to the ground on a pass route during spring practice. "You can't play football if you can't keep your feet" he shouted at me. Unfortunately, that had been happening frequently that spring because the cleats I had were terrible!

Cleats have come a long way since my college days and I certainly wish I would have had the choices in cleats that kids have now. My recommendation is to get a low-top, light weight cleat that is either a screw-in type or one with a hard, molded bottom. Personally, I don't like screw-in's too much because they tend to increase the chances of developing shin splints. When you run in a screw-in cleat, due to the individual cleats themselves being spaced farther apart than on a molded cleat, the foot will have the tendency to tilt from side to side a bit more easily. Additionally, when on a harder surface, screw-in cleats can really beat your feet up.

Molded cleats provide for a much smoother gate since the individual cleats are spaced closer together and there are a lot more of them. The foot is generally more stable in a molded cleat and, personally, I found molded cleats to have better traction. When I played professionally I had an old pair of Nike Tiempos

that I loved. I rarely slipped in those cleats during a game. So, your first order of business is to go out and get yourself a good pair of cleats because you won't be able to run a pass route the way I teach a route if you can't stay on your feet!



The Nike Vapor Talon Elite football cleat combines lightweight hyperfuse construction with an innovative traction pattern, resulting in a cleat that's ideal for sharp cuts and quick acceleration.

Stance

Your stance at the line of scrimmage is more important than you think. A majority of the receivers I've seen, at every level, have an inefficient stance. It is an often overlooked fundamental by many coaches. The stability of your stance will determine your ability to come off the line of scrimmage effectively. The stance I see most often is one where the receiver has a majority of his weight on the front foot and the other foot is placed almost directly behind the front foot, his front shin is completely vertical and he is either leaning too far forward or standing too tall. To compensate for the lack of lateral stability when the feet are placed this narrowly, these receivers will cock their front foot inward at a 45 degree angle.

See the next photo to illustrate what I am describing in this section.

When I encounter a receiver that has a stance like this, it is very easy to show him why this stance is so inefficient. I will let the receiver get in this stance and then I will stand in front of him as a press coverage defender. I simply club him on one of his shoulders and knock him off balance laterally or, if he is leaning too far forward, I will grab him at the top of the shoulder pads and drive him down to the ground. It is not possible to have any lateral stability when the back foot is directly behind the front foot and if the forward body lean is too great it is very easy to take a receiver

to the ground. If a receiver is standing too tall, a good jam technique by a defender will completely stone him at the line of scrimmage.

The other thing I will ask a receiver to attempt out of a stance like this is to take an immediate, 45 degree step to the inside with their front foot. Invariably, the receiver will false step with their back foot out of a stance like this. With the feet so narrow it is impossible to take a quick, 45 degree step to the inside or outside with the front foot without first stabilizing the stance by false stepping with the back foot. This is due to having almost zero lateral stability.



Now, these problems are very easy to eliminate if the proper stance is applied but rarely do I see a receiver in a truly efficient stance, even in the NFL! Here are the techniques associated with a proper stance:

1. Feet are shoulder width
2. Inside foot is forward
3. Back foot is no more than one or two foot lengths behind the front foot, whichever is more comfortable
4. Front shin is at a 30 degree angle forward (knee over the toes)
5. Upper body is at a 30 degree angle forward
6. Hands at waist level with the forearms parallel to the ground

Watch Movie 2.1 Proper Stance for a Receiver



Notice the forward lean and the natural 'roll off' his front foot as the receiver above comes off the snap of the ball. With the front shin at a 30 degree angle it is already in a drive phase and this prevents false stepping by the back foot.

Here are the benefits:

1. With the feet at shoulder width a receiver has good lateral stability. He can step 45 degrees either inside or outside with the front foot, without false stepping with the back foot, and an aggressive corner can't knock him off balance laterally.
2. With the back foot at no more than one or two foot lengths behind the front foot, it is much easier to drive the rear knee forward after rolling off of the front foot.

3. With the front shin at a 30 degree angle forward, the leg from the knee down is in a better bio-mechanical position to propel the body forward. If the shin is straight up and down the knee has to move forward before that part of the leg has enough of a bio-mechanical advantage to propel the rest of the body forward.

4. With the body at the same 30 degree angle as the front shin it is much easier for the body to move forward in conjunction with rolling off of the front foot.

5. When the hands are at waist level they are already in position to apply the different types of hand techniques we will use when releasing off of the line of scrimmage against a defender in press coverage.

Plant Foot

It is important to understand exactly what the plant foot is. The plant foot is the foot used by a receiver to change directions. You will see receivers pivot on their plant foot in the second phase of a pass route (see route phases under terms). Understanding the use of this foot is the most important technique in a receiver's arsenal. This is THE foot used to create separation from a defender.

Not only does the plant foot act as the foundation from which a receiver will change directions, it is the step within the progression of a receiver's route that must be firm and rooted in the ground. In other words, due to the fact that a receiver uses

this foot to make the most drastic change of direction within the route progression, it must be firmly planted in the ground such that the receiver does not slip and fall.

An example of a plant foot within the context of a six yard hitch route would be the last step in the route where the receiver comes to a dead stop, then pivots off of (as well as pushes off of) this foot to take one step towards the quarterback. I call this the ***pivot plant foot*** as described in the next section. Ideally, the ball will be on the way as the receiver turns so that, as he steps towards the quarterback, he is also stepping towards the ball in flight. Taking one step towards the ball in flight is what will create or maintain separation from the defensive back. This step forward begins with the plant foot.

An example of a plant foot within the context of a ten yard post route would be the last step in the route where the receiver changes directions from a vertical push up the field to a post angle to the inside of the field at ten yards. The method I teach when applying the plant foot on a post route is that the receiver will attack the defender's outside shoulder whereas, at the breaking point of the route (where the plant foot goes into the ground), the plant foot will be outside of the width of the defender's body. At the exact same moment that the receiver's plant foot goes into the ground he will also push off of this foot so as to enter the post phase (second phase) of the pass route.

By attacking the outside shoulder of the defensive back we are trying to make him think we are committing the route to the outside of the field, hoping to turn the defensive back's hips and shoulders towards the outside. Once the DB's hips and shoulders begin to open to the outside of the field, the plant foot will help the receiver push to the post phase of the route. The idea here is to slip right off of the defender's inside hip (weak hip). We will go into more detail on this technique in the chapter titled Stemming.



Pivot Plant Foot Technique

The pivot plant foot technique is used on all routes where the receiver comes to a dead stop before changing directions. I refer to these as stop routes and they include, for the most part, hitches, curls, whips and come-backs. Let's use the six yard hitch route again as an example here.

As mentioned previously, the plant foot is the last step in the hitch route before the receiver pivots to the inside to face the quarterback and step towards the ball in flight. The crucial aspect of using the plant foot as a pivot to change directions in a hitch route is ***the angle of the plant foot***. The outside foot is the plant foot that we will be pivoting off of when executing the hitch route. I call this foot the ***pivot plant foot***.

Movie 2.2 Pivot Plant Foot on Route Transition



To properly execute this technique I have the receiver turn the plant foot to the inside at a 45 degree angle. This 45 degree angle facilitates the opening of the hips to the inside. The advantage of the hips opening is that the receiver is able to get his entire body rotated to the inside much more quickly and much more easily. This allows the receiver to move to the ball much easier, particularly if the throw is not exactly on target. This same technique would be used on all stop routes which require the receiver to come to a dead stop and then turn the body anywhere from 90-180 degrees in the opposite direction.

To briefly mention an applicable drill here, I have my receivers run the **top of the route** (last three set-up steps) simply to emphasize the footwork on this portion of the route. This can be done with or without throwing a football to them.

The last key point to emphasize pertaining to any type of stop route and the pivot plant foot is to always enter the set-up steps portion of the route with the **shoulders facing up-field**. Often, a receiver will turn his shoulders and hips sideways as he breaks down.

This is an extremely ineffective way to stop. The body and shoulders must stay facing up field until the pivot plant foot is down. This is the only way to effectively drop the hips, bend the knees, and come to a quick stop. This will also translate well into any type of stop and go route. It is much easier to execute a

transition from a stop to a vertical route with the shoulders facing up-field.



The Feet Relative to Balance

There hasn't been a year that has gone by in my twenty plus years of coaching where the scenario I am about to explain has not happened! I constantly emphasize to my receivers to **keep their feet under their shoulders or within the framework of their body when changing directions**.

We just finished discussing the pivot plant foot and it's role associated with changing directions. Aside from having a poor pair of cleats or slippery field conditions, the reason a receiver will slip and fall to the ground when making a cut is due to not having the plant foot under the shoulders or within the framework of the body. This is the case 100% of the time. I always explain this to my receivers prior to describing how I want a route executed but, invariably, receivers will fall down due to having their plant foot well outside the framework of their body. This happens time and time again! As a coach I continuously emphasize this point until my players get it right.

Later in this book we will discuss all the techniques associated with running a pass route properly but I will jump ahead here in order to more easily explain the bio-mechanics involved with keeping the plant foot within the framework of the body when making a cut.

When a receiver makes a cut he must do so by dropping his hips low to the ground and bending his knees. By keeping the plant foot within the framework of the body, combined with dropping the hips and bending the knees, all of the receiver's body weight is directly over the top of the plant foot. This will assure that the cleat of the plant foot will be firmly pressed into the ground and that all of the force associated with making a cut will be over the top of the plant foot. If this technique is executed properly, the receiver will never slip. In wet conditions I tell my receivers to

shorten their steps a bit as well as emphasize pumping the arms to enhance balance.

When the plant foot gets outside of the framework of the body, all of the downward forces associated with lowering the body to make a cut are now forcing the plant foot laterally versus directly downward. This lateral force is what will cause a cleat to lose it's grip from the turf and cause the receiver to slip.

An additional benefit of keeping the feet within the framework of the body when making a cut is the ability to explode out of the cut. When a receiver drops his hips and bends his knees in the process of changing directions he is, in essence, loading or compressing his spring (the spring being the leg of the plant foot). When the leg of the plant foot is bent within the framework of the body at the time of the plant, the plant leg can then be extended to create an explosive movement in the direction of the cut. This creates separation from the defender and moves the receiver towards the ball.

If the plant foot and leg is outside of the framework of the body at the time of the cut, that leg will already be extended too far and thus can not be used to propel the receiver in the direction of the cut. A good analogy would be a snake that is recoiled into a ball. When recoiled like this he can strike out at it's prey. A snake that is fully extended along the ground can not do this. When referring to a receiver that comes out of his break properly, I call this explosive separation.

The Hips and Shoulders

The hips follow what the feet do and the shoulders follow the hips. In order to control what the upper body does, the hips must be flexible and able to rotate in line with the feet. As I've previously mentioned, we apply the 45 degree pivot plant foot technique specifically to open the hips.

When the hips rotate, a receiver must pull the shoulders around with the hips by what he does with his elbows. Let's use a curl route as an example.

Movie 2.3 Transition, Start & Stop or "Breaking Down"



As the receiver breaks down and reaches the point where the plant foot becomes the pivot foot by placing it at a 45 degree

angle, the hips will open. In order to bring the shoulders around following the hips, the elbow opposite of the pivot plant foot needs to be pulled around in order to assist shoulder rotation. As the shoulders open to the inside of the field, the play-side foot (opposite foot to the pivot foot) should be pointing in the direction of the quarterback and as the receiver drives off of the pivot foot he steps towards the quarterback and directly at the ball which should already be in flight.

The Eyes and Head

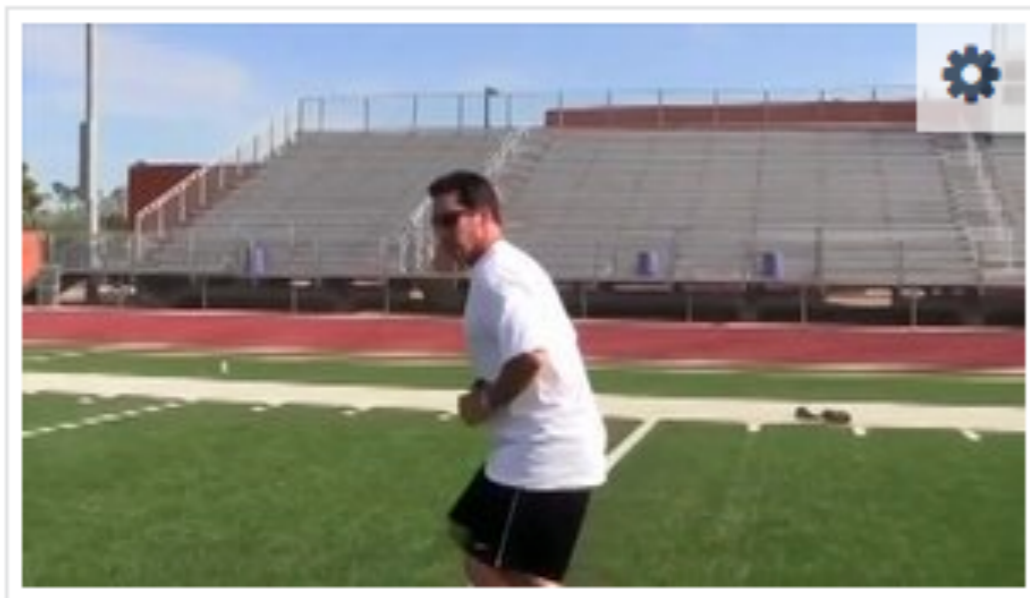
Up to this point, the order in which all of a receiver's body bio-mechanics have worked are the feet to the hips to the shoulders. The parts of the body that work independently and out of order from the feet, hips, and shoulders are the eyes and the head. Again, we will continue to use a curl route as an example of how all of these bio-mechanics work. Over the years I've often heard coaches who state to never turn the head before turning inside on a curl or hitch route. The reasoning behind this is to not key the defender that you are making a break. I happen to disagree with this.

There comes a point in any type of stop route where the receiver commits to breaking down and changing direction and this happens at the top of the route as I've described. At this point the receiver is showing his cards to the defender that a change of direction is coming. If a receiver executes this portion of the route properly it happens within a matter of a split second because,

ideally, we want the receiver to go from full speed to a dead stop within no more than a two yard window. The great receivers can do this in three steps. During this three step break-down phase of the route, I advocate my receivers to get their head and eyes around ***before anything else***. My reasoning behind this is based on when the ball should be leaving the quarterback's hand.

When a quarterback and receiver are in perfect synchronicity with one another, the ball should be leaving the quarterback's hand before the receiver has even turned in his route. Due to this, it is extremely important for a receiver to get his head and eyes around to find the flight of the football as soon as possible.

Movie 2.4 The Eyes and The Head: "Take a peek"



In a perfect scenario the ball will always be thrown to a spot where the receiver expects it to be but we all know that this is not

always the case because football involves too many variables that can disrupt how a play is executed. With that in mind, let's say that the quarterback is hit just as he releases the ball and this causes the ball into a trajectory too far to the inside of where the receiver is breaking. If the receiver gets his head and eyes around before he commits to opening his hips and rotating his shoulders, he can adjust his play side foot (foot opposite of the plant foot) to step more to the inside where the ball is going. This allows the receiver to move his body to the ball versus having to lunge at a ball off-balance.

Later in this book we will discuss the importance of a receiver taking his body to the ball as this is something I put a tremendous amount of emphasis on.

We have just discussed the parts of the body that are involved with executing various techniques associated with playing the receiver position. In many instances I have jumped ahead to what we will be discussing in more detail later on. But I want you to understand how proper bio-mechanics play such a vital role in performing the fundamentals of this position effectively.

We will be going into more detail on how to run particular pass routes, the techniques and strategies involved with these pass routes, how to catch the ball properly, how to block properly, how to read coverages, and more. But, before we forge on, let me offer the importance of film/video study and it can dramatically improve your bio-mechanics of the game.

A true student of the game will get video of themselves and then study it (drills, routes, catching and practice). With today's smart phones and/or high definition video cameras it's so easy to capture quality footage that can be used for instruction.

I've even used the small Contour™ or GoPro™ helmet cam on my receivers and discovered amazing detail and tendencies that the naked eye could not see unless recorded and slowed down.



Three Ways to Enhance Your On-Field Bio-Mechanics

Football is an explosive sport; plays often last between 2 - 15 seconds. In most cases all the strength and power is put out in a few shots or quick bursts then you get 20 - 40 seconds of rest and do it again. Therefore, simulate your game-time on-the-field movements and pace as you lift weights, train and practice.

For example, a good work-out might use a 5x5 program allowing the body to exert maximum force in multiple sessions with 20 - 40 seconds of rest between each set. Do you see the connection with that system and how it ties into the sport of football?

Below are three great ways for an athlete to improve their football skills.

1. **Full Speed Practice.** The more you simulate game-time speed in practice the better you will perform in a game.
2. **Train Your Brain Through Repetition.** A motor skill can become natural and automated if you repeat it enough.
3. **Strength, Speed & Agility Training.** Football is a game of quick bursts, explosiveness, and quickness. It's more about plyometrics and less about how much you can bench press.



In my experience, the athletes who are dedicated to getting better always do.

If you are unwilling to get better, no one can help you, but if you are determined to get better, no one can stop you!

I assure you that with concentrated work in these three areas you can dramatically improve your skills and thus your stock as a receiver.



Review 2.1 Proper Stance

Proper stance includes: A majority of weight on the front foot and the other foot placed almost directly behind the front foot

- A.** True
- B.** False

Check Answer

Review 2.2 Plant Foot

The crucial aspect of using the plant foot as a pivot to change directions in a hitch route is

- A.** flight of the ball
- B.** the speed of the plant foot
- C.** the angle of the plant foot

Check Answer

Review 2.3 Slipping

The most common reason I see receivers slip and fall is

- A.** they don't keep their arms moving as they are changing directions
- B.** they don't keep their feet under their shoulders or within the framework of their body when changing directions.
- C.** they are using turf cleats on a real grass field.

Check Answer

Review 2.4 In Sync with your Quarterback

When a quarterback and receiver are in perfect synchronicity with one another on a curl route

- A.** the ball should leave the quarterback's hand the moment the receiver makes his turn.
- B.** the ball should leave the quarterback's hand after the receiver makes his turn.
- C.** the ball should leave the quarterback's hand before the receiver has turned in his route.

Check Answer

Attacking The Defender

Now let's talk about how to come off the line of scrimmage and attack the defender. Offense is proactive and defense is reactive. Offensive players know exactly what they are doing, defensive players have to react to what offensive players do. This is the part of it that makes playing receiver so fun!



Attacking the Defender

CHAPTER 3

1. Deception
2. Variable Speed Releases
3. The Shoulders
4. Running Up The Toes

Deception

We've already discussed the elements of a proper stance so now let's talk about how to come off the line of scrimmage and attack the defender. Offense is proactive and defense is reactive. Offensive players know exactly what they are doing, defensive players have to react to what offensive players do. This is the part of it that makes playing receiver so fun! A receiver has the opportunity to make the defender think he is doing one thing when he is actually doing another.

For a receiver, everything starts at the line of scrimmage. The battle that takes place throughout the game between a receiver and a defender is physical as well as mental. Mentally, a receiver can get into the head of a defender right from the line of scrimmage. It is important for a receiver to break the huddle and get to the line of scrimmage as quickly as possible as there are several benefits associated with this. I tell my receivers to break the huddle as soon as they get the play call and sprint to their spot on the line so that they have time to scan the secondary for coverage recognition. Additionally, I want them to size up the defender playing over them. What is his alignment technique? Is he off the line? Is he leveraging the field to one side or the other? Is he looking in at the quarterback at the snap of the ball? Is he up tight playing press coverage?

The sooner a receiver can determine the coverage and the technique a defender might be playing, the better, as it gives the receiver time to formulate a strategy on how to attack the defender and coverage scheme as a whole. We will go into coverages and leverage techniques later on.

One of the mental games I use to play with a defender was to lock eyes with him if possible. Obviously, this is easier to do if the defender is in press coverage but you can still accomplish this if the defender is six to eight yards off the ball. Do what you can to get his attention without calling his father a name!

I knew the route I was running or the adjustment I would need to make on a route after recognizing the coverage. After locking eyes with the defender I would then scan the field in the opposite direction of the route I was actually running. As an example, if I were running an out cut at 10 yards (towards the sideline), I would make sure the defender's eyes had locked with mine and then I would scan the middle of the field. I tried to make it very obvious that I was scanning the middle of the field!

The deception I was trying to create right from the line of scrimmage did not stop there. After the snap of the ball and progressing into the route, right as I hit my plant foot for the out cut I would also turn my head to the inside. With this type of body movement I was further convincing the defender that I was about ready to break the route towards the middle of the field.

You see, before ever committing to the second phase of the route, I had put it into the head of the defender that I was looking to run a route into the middle of the field and I reinforced this with the head fake at the top of the route. There is a pretty high percentage that the defender would start to drive on the route to the inside of the field as I head faked in conjunction with my plant foot.

Now, lets say we have used this technique on the defender a couple of times during the game on an outward breaking route. What do you think he will be thinking the next time I come to the line of scrimmage, scan an area of the field, and then apply a head fake in that same direction at the top of my route? He is also trying to stay one step ahead by predicting my body language. I have to be smart enough to realize this so I am always going to stay one step ahead of him in this mental cat and mouse game.



I realize that, after applying the same technique a couple of times, that the defender is no longer going to fall for that tactic. So, given the same scenario of running a ten yard out cut, I will now come to the line of scrimmage, lock eyes with the defender and then scan the outside of the field! The defender has already got it in his mind that I am scanning the the field opposite of the side that I am running the route to and then giving a head fake in the direction of the field that I scanned from the LOS. This time, however, I will actually scan the field in the direction of where I truly am running the route! When I get to my plant foot at the top of the route I will not apply a head fake but simply turn my head in the actual direction of the out route. Since the defender is expecting me to scan the field opposite of where I am running my route now, this time he will be expecting me to break to the middle!

What do you think will be going through the mind of the defender the next time I come to the line of scrimmage? Probably a whole bunch of doubt and that's what I am trying to create here! I have now gotten the defender to a point where he will be hesitant to get that jump on a route and from that point forward I will have him on his heels. Once this happens that defender is mentally defeated and you should be able to do just about anything you want the rest of the game! Don't get lazy though, continue to play mind games with him from the line of scrimmage and continue to try and stay one step ahead.

Variable Speed Releases to Enhance Deception

Variable speed releases are techniques whereas the receiver varies the speed in which he runs a route. They are extremely effective when attacking a defender. I define them as such:

Glide-Burst-Break

Burst-Glide-Burst-Break

Here is an example. If a receiver was running a comeback route at 14 yards back to 12 yards and he was to apply a Burst-Glide-Burst-Break technique he would burst full speed from the line of scrimmage for five yards, throttle down to 3/4 speed for five yards, burst again to full speed for another four yards and then break to the comeback at 14 yards. On the second burst it will usually get that defender to take off and run to protect the deep route.

The same route using a Glide-Burst-Break would be a 3/4 speed glide off the line of scrimmage to seven yards, then a burst to 14 yards and the comeback. The change in speed is extremely deceptive to a defender and mixing up these two techniques will really keep the defender guessing. Variable speed releases can be used on any intermediate to deep route but are most effective on stop type routes. You can't use this technique on quick routes.

The Shoulders

As we discussed in the previous section, a defender is constantly trying to read the body language of a receiver in order to gain an advantage. We just got done discussing how mind games can start right from the line of scrimmage. Once the ball is snapped there is more you need to do with your body to deceive your opponent.

A receiver should always attack a defender with a forward body lean. The shoulders should always be forward at an approximate 30 degree angle when a receiver runs a pass route. This forward body lean is threatening to the defender. It gives the impression of attacking the defender vertically. At some point, as a receiver pushes up field vertically, a defender must come out of his back pedal, turn, and run with the receiver. Once a receiver's shoulders straighten up and he stands tall, it will key a defender to a change of direction since many receivers have the tendency to do this at the top of the route.

When running stop routes (hitch, curl, comeback), often a receiver will straighten the shoulders, rise up tall, and then sit too far back on their heels while trying to come to a stop. Once the shoulders straighten up and he stands tall (this typically happens even before the receiver starts to break down) it will key the defender that the receiver is about to break. You don't want to do this!

A receiver needs to maintain that 30 degree forward body lean even when he is breaking his route. The benefits are two-fold. One, you won't be keying the defender to a break point and (refer to the section on feet relative to balance) as you drop your hips and bend your knees, a forward shoulder lean keeps the upper body over the toes and helps to drive the feet in into the ground assuring that the plant foot will stay firmly in the ground. This [Movie 2.3 in Chapter 2](#) also covers what we are talking about.

Running Up the Toes

What I am about to describe next is probably the most critical aspect of successful pass route running. As a receiver you don't want to show your cards too early as a pass route develops.

We are going to use a 10 yard post route as an example of how to run up the toes of the defender. If a defender is playing soft coverage anywhere from 6 to 10 yards off the line of scrimmage, a receiver needs to close that cushion on the defender during the first phase of the route and he needs to close that cushion as quickly as possible.

I make sure my receivers come off the line of scrimmage like their butt's are on fire! Using the term "run up the toes" of the defender is almost literally as it sounds. A receiver should close the cushion on the defender to within about a yard and a half (or about arm's length) at most before he breaks on a route. If a receiver comes off the line of scrimmage lazily and it takes too

long to close the cushion on the defensive back, most likely, the route won't develop fast enough and the QB will be sacked.

As the receiver gets to that point about a yard and a half from the defender, he will then make his break to the post. Ideally, if the route calls for the post break at 10 yards, the receiver has run up the toes of the defender at about ten yards. It doesn't always happen that way however.

Watch Movie 3.1 Running Up the Toes



Let me emphasize that when it comes to running pass routes, breaking the cushion of the defender and running up his toes is much more important than breaking the route at the exact yardage that the route calls for. Depending on the speed of the

receiver or depending on the speed of the defender's drop, the cushion could be broken at 8 yards or 12 yards.

In other words, the receiver could get to within a yard and a half of the defender by the time he reaches 8 yards or a yard and a half by the time he reaches 12 yards. Trust me, the ability to cover 4 yards when a receiver is running full speed is only a split second. That split second is not enough to disrupt the timing of the throw. Besides, if the receiver flawlessly executes the technique that I am explaining, the separation he will create from the defender will be so vast that the split second in timing will be inconsequential!

Watch Movie 3.2 Stacking the Defender



I typically teach a post route with stemming variations but we will go into that in the section that covers route stemming. By running straight up the toes of the defender, the receiver causes the defender to hesitate until the last second. The defender does not know whether the receiver will be breaking the route inside or outside until the receiver gets within a yard and a half of his toes. By closing this cushion the receiver is able to break his route right off of the hip of the defender. This will allow the receiver to "slip and slide the hip" and "stack" the defender immediately after committing to the break. This technique is best utilized when running a "skinny" post. This is a post route where the post angle is not much more than an approximate 10 degree angle inside of the defender. The "skinny post" is used to stay away from a safety to the inside of the field. Based on the definition of stacking, the receiver gets on top of the defender and puts the defender in a trail position right after breaking off of his hip.

Let me give you an example of what will happen if a receiver does not run up the toes of the defender. If the receiver hits his 10 yard break point but the defender still has a three yard cushion, the defender will still be on top of the receiver when the receiver comes out of his break. We don't want this to happen as this will give the defender the opportunity to cut-off the receiver's route. The defender will be in a much better position to make a play on the ball when he is on top of the receiver or on the receiver's hip.

Let's use a 12 yard curl route as an example of how to run up the toes of the defender as the technique is a bit different in this case. When running a curl route against a defender the receiver wants the defender to think he is running a vertical route past him. The receiver must get the defensive back out of his back pedal. If the defender is allowed to simply back pedal, plant, and then drive on the route after the receiver breaks, this is an advantage to the defender.



As the receiver pushes up field he will do so by attacking the defender's outside shoulder. The receiver is trying to give the impression that he is running a vertical route to the outside shoulder of the defender. If the receiver runs up the toes of the defender by the time he reaches 8 yards he needs to continue that route vertically on the outside shoulder of the defender. The idea here is to get the defender out of his back pedal, enticing him to turn and run. By the time the receiver hits the twelve yard breaking point the defender has already opened his hips to run vertically with the receiver. At this point, the receiver should break down at 12 yards, turn the plant foot 45 degrees inside, club the defender by him and then "sift" under the defender. The receiver should push hard towards the ball in flight. The reason the receiver should attack the outside shoulder of the defender and not the inside shoulder is so that he creates width from the middle of the field. This gives the receiver the room necessary to work back inside without crossing into the zone of another defender. A curl route can be run to the inside shoulder of a defender but we will go into detail about that later under route running.

Now, let's elaborate on what would happen if the receiver ran this route straight up the toes of the defender without pushing him vertically. If, by the time the receiver hits his breaking point at twelve yards, he has not opened the hips of the defender it will be very easy for the defender to plant and drive on the route. The only way for the route to be successful in this scenario would be if

the defender's cushion were so great that it would be too difficult for him to close the cushion even after the planting and driving on the route. This happens when the defender is playing a very soft zone or an off-man coverage. That is actually an ideal scenario for the receiver and usually happens after the receiver has beaten the defender deep a few times or if the defense is in some type of prevent situation.



Chapter 4

Line Releases

The position of receiver requires a player to possess the greatest combination of athletic skills of any other position. Agility, hand-eye coordination, balance, precision of movement, deception, explosiveness, the ability to concentrate under duress, and toughness define a great receiver.



Line Releases

CHAPTER 4

1. Line Releases
2. Release Footwork
3. Release Handwork

Line Releases

The position of receiver requires a player to possess the greatest combination of athletic skills of any other position. Agility, hand-eye coordination, balance, precision of movement, deception, explosiveness, the ability to concentrate under duress, and toughness define a great receiver. Now that I've painted a picture for you let's look at just one of the things you'll need to master as a receiver; line releases. Some receivers refer to a line release as "getting off the jam."

There are many different types of line releases which utilize the upper and lower body. When used in various combinations they will keep the defender "off balance" and allow for a "clean" release. These techniques should be changed up constantly as we want to use one release to set up one of the other two releases. The idea is to always keep the defender guessing as to which release we will use. It starts with what we do with our feet and finishes with what we do with our hands. The objective is to have as little contact with the defender as possible. We want to be able to move the defender to a side and run where he used to be. **We don't ever want to run around a defender as this will disrupt our pass route alignment down field.**

Let's first watch a video on line releases, and then we'll discuss all of the techniques demonstrated.

Watch Movie 4.1 Receiver Line Releases



[Here is a link to the second segment of the video above.](#)

Let's use a comeback or sideline route as an example of why we don't want to run around the defender. If you end up running around the outside of a defender when running this route and you end up running two yards outside of your alignment on the line of scrimmage, by the time you reach your breaking point (typically at 14 yards working a 45 angle back down to 12 yards toward the sideline) you will not have the room necessary to catch the football before running out of bounds.

Coaches have you align on certain spots on the field for a reason. Usually, if you are running a route that breaks to the outside of the field you will typically line up at the top of the numbers as a reference point. In other words, you will usually cut your split

down when running a route that breaks to the outside. So, you can see the problem if you end up running around a defensive back in press coverage and you end up two yards wider than where you started on the line of scrimmage.

Release Footwork

The idea when performing the proper release footwork is to move towards the defender, reducing his cushion, and create side to side movement avoiding major contact with the defender. To reduce the cushion we start with what are called "jab steps". These are three to four very quick steps and they are performed while moving towards the defender. "Jab steps" will always proceed the following footwork techniques:

One Step: Beginning with the "jab steps" we will then take a hard, wide (outside the width of the defender's body) step opposite the direction we will be releasing. Once the defender has opened to the side of the large step we will then immediately "pop" off that step in the opposite direction attacking the defender's "weak" hip. The term "weak" hip refers to the leg that the defender does not have his weight on. In other words, if we take a hard step to the right and the defender transfers his weight onto his left leg, his "weak" hip is now his right leg. The reason I use the term "weak" hip is because we want to slide off that hip and up field. Once we do this we want to immediately re-establish a vertical position (stacking) on the defender and put him in an

immediate “trail position”. I will go into more detail on stacking at the end of this section.

Two Step: Again, beginning with our “jab steps” we will then take a short, quick lateral first step in the direction we will ultimately release to followed by a hard, wide lateral step to the opposite side of our release. Once the defender has opened to the side of our second step we will then “pop” off of our plant foot, attacking his weak hip and re-establish vertical (stack) up field in the same manner, stacking the defender.

Zero Step: The zero step release should be used only when we know we have the defender hesitating based on setting him up with the other two releases. If the defender hesitates, wondering whether we will be performing a one step or two step release, we can now simply apply our jab steps and then release to a side. This technique is the most effective in combination with how we use our hands on a release and that will be explained in the next section where I describe how to use the hands on a line release.



Release Handwork

The idea when performing line release hand techniques is to manipulate the defender’s upper torso so as to turn him or control his ability to get his hands on the receiver and stop his momentum at the line of scrimmage. The following techniques should always be used in combination with our release footwork.

Club, Punch, and Press: The club is the arm we use on our release side to pin the defender’s release side arm. Defenders are taught to grab and hold as much as possible without being caught and we want to prevent them from being able to do this. So, if we are releasing to the right of the defender, our club arm will be our right arm. The club is applied by pinning the defender’s release side arm with our hand. We attack the defender’s elbow and not his forearm or hands.

The elbow moves much less than the forearm and hands so it is a much easier target. Once we pin the defender’s elbow with our club technique we will then punch our opposite hand right over the defender’s release side shoulder. We do not “swim” as is often taught as that will expose our arm pit and give the defender an area to attack with his open hand and knock us off balance.

Once we punch our arm through the shoulder of the defender we then apply pressure with that arm to the defender’s back side. This makes it very difficult for the defender to be able to turn and

chase as we stack the defender and it also helps to propel us away from the defender and up field.

Club, Punch, Pull-By: This technique is performed in the exact same manner as the previous technique except that we don't press the defender's back side. Instead, we will grab the back of the defender's shoulder pad flap and pull by the defender. This technique is particularly effective because we can literally rotate the torso of the defender making it extremely difficult for him to be able to turn and chase us up field.



Double Hand Slap: The double hand slap is probably the most common and easiest hand technique to perform. In combination with whatever release footwork we use we will simply take both our hands and slap down the forearms of the defender before he has a chance to “jam” us or grab any part of our jersey. As previously mentioned, it is very important to combine both release footwork techniques with hand techniques. An example would be using a one step footwork technique to open the defender and then finish by applying a double hand slap technique to assure the defender can not get his hands on us as we release up field. Often, if we perform a footwork technique to perfection we will have the defender so off balance that he can't possibly get his hands on us.

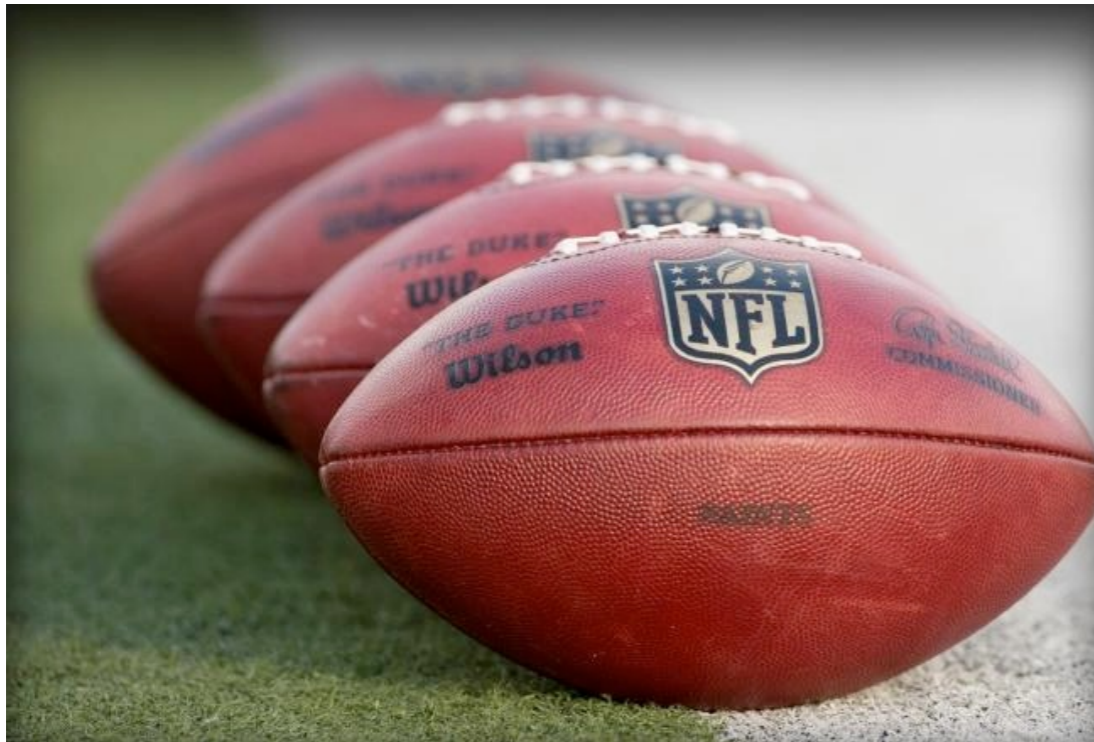
Coaching Points

When performing a line release it is very important to understand the concept of moving the hips and not just the feet. Often, when I'm teaching line releases for the first time a player will take lateral steps outside the body of the defender but he will do so only with his feet. He will extend his feet outside the center of his own body without actually moving his body with his feet. A defender is taught to keep his eyes on the hips of a receiver in press coverage. If the hips don't move with the feet the defender won't move either. So, when you step outside the width of the defender's body you must move your hips and entire body with the steps you make. The idea is to get the defender to step or

open up with you to the side you are stepping. This will create the space necessary to attack the defender's weak hip and allow you to release up-field on the defender without having to run around him as I described at the beginning of this section.

Stacking

Stacking is one of the terms defined at the beginning of this document. It is most often applied when performing line releases against a press corner and it is a very important technique that will allow a receiver to put his body in the best position to catch the football. Once a receiver establishes a good line release and he has slipped by the weak hip of the defender he must then slide back on top of the defender and put him in an immediate "trail" position. I call this a "slip and slide".



Once the defender is put in a trail position it gives the receiver what we call a "two way go" from a position on top of the defender. This means that because the defender is in a trail position he is not able to take away or block either side of the field from the receiver. The receiver can freely break inside or outside without having to worry about being cut-off by the defender.

[Stacking Video](#) from Chapter 3.

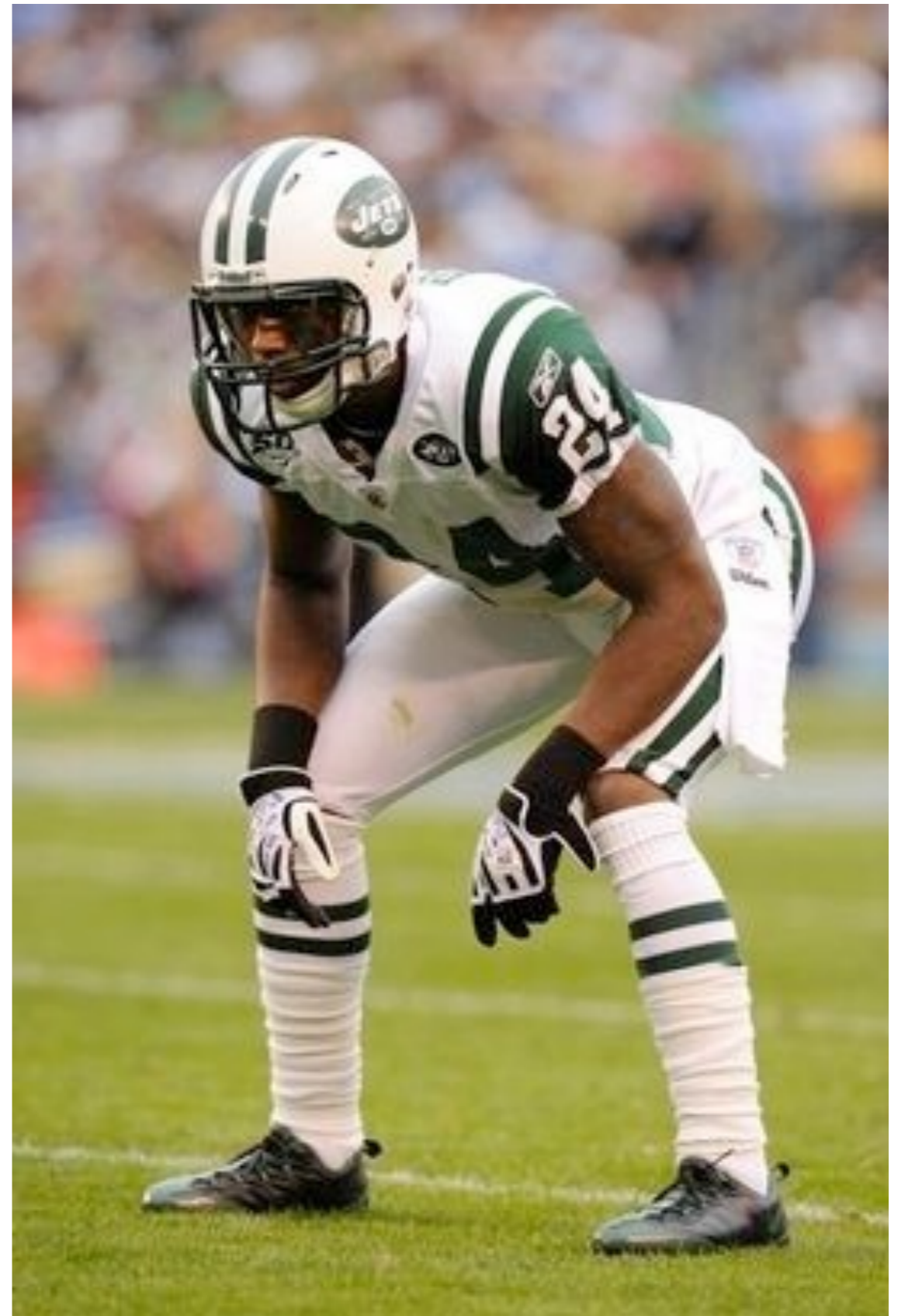
A two way go can also be created with the defender on top of the receiver. This is accomplished by the receiver squaring up the defender but we will go into that later. Additionally, if the receiver is running a go route, fade route, or seam route and he stacks the defender, it makes it much more difficult for the defender to make a play on the ball when he is trailing the receiver. Defenders like to be running on the inside hip, on top of the receiver, or only a half step behind the receiver at the very most when defending a vertical route.

Lastly, when running any type of vertical route versus press coverage, stacking becomes extremely important pertaining to a wide receiver's relationship to the sideline. The whole idea of a fade route is to "fade" to the ball over the outside shoulder, away from the defender. I see this route taught incorrectly all the time. When performed incorrectly I often see the receiver run around the defender off the line of scrimmage and start fading to the sideline right away. The problem with this is that when the

receiver fades immediately he will draw the defender with him. If this happens the receiver no longer has the room to fade away from the defender to the sideline in order to create separation on the catch.

The proper way to run the route is to stack the defender off the line of scrimmage and maintain a vertical push up the field without working towards the sideline. If the receiver is unable to stack the defender he should, at the very least, keep the defender on his inside hip and not allow that defender to force him to the sideline. The receiver wants to maintain a vertical push so that he has room to “fade” once the ball is thrown. Ideally, the QB will throw the ball over the outside shoulder of the receiver which will allow the receiver to fade away from the defender only when the ball is in the air. This will allow for separation to take place and it is almost impossible for the defender as he not only has to move vertically with the receiver but also laterally.

If done correctly, not even the guy in the next picture can defend it!



Stemming



Stemming is a technique that enables a receiver to work angles either off of the line of scrimmage or down field when running a pass route. It enables a receiver to take away the “leverage” that a defender might be applying in a specific coverage.

Stemming

CHAPTER 5

1. Line of Scrimmage Stems
2. Down-Field Stemming
3. The double move stem
4. Down-Field Stemming Strategy
5. Stair Step Stem vs Man Coverage
6. Bate Technique

Stemming

Stemming is a technique that enables a receiver to work angles either off of the line of scrimmage or down field when running a pass route. It enables a receiver to take away the “leverage” that a defender might be applying in a specific coverage. Leveraging is when the defender lines up either inside or outside of the receiver at the line of scrimmage. Leverage can be applied from a press coverage technique or a soft coverage technique. An example of a press leverage technique that is often seen is a corner lined up inside-out on a receiver in the red zone (the red zone is typically 20 yards or closer to the goal line), more often from the five yard line or closer. The reason the corner is leveraged inside of the receiver is because the linebackers and safeties are typically closer to the line of scrimmage in a goal line package so as to play run and are not able to help defend any type of inside route by a receiver.

Outside of the red zone, a soft leverage technique can be applied by a corner who does not have safety help to the inside of the field. This is often seen when the offense is lined up in a Trips/Open formation with three receivers to the strong side of the field and one receiver to the weak side of the field. The Free Safety will usually play over the top of the number 3 receiver (furthest inside) on the strong side of the formation and the weak side corner is in man coverage with the weak side receiver. The weak corner will play an inside-out leverage because he does

not have safety help to the inside of the field. What we will be discussing next are the different types of “stem” techniques a receiver can apply when leveraged by a defender.

LOS (Line of Scrimmage) Stems

A coverage that is seen often that requires the corner to apply leverage to the wide receiver is called Cover 2. The coverage responsibility of the corners with this coverage are the flats to the outside of the field from the line of scrimmage to about ten yards in depth. Any receiver that enters this “zone” is the corner’s responsibility. From the line of scrimmage the corner can be anywhere from 4 yards off the line and 1 yard outside of the receiver to on the line of scrimmage playing an outside shade of the receiver. I would call this outside leverage. The corner does not want the receiver to release outside of him. There are two safeties aligned approximately 12 yards deep and on each hash mark in this coverage.

Both safeties are in half coverage which means they are covering from the center of the field to the sideline at the third level. The corner will apply what is called a “funnel” technique to the receiver. What he tries to do is “funnel” or force the receiver to release inside of him so that the safety can help over the top on a route that pushes vertically beyond the depth of the corner.

This “funnel” technique is basically a re-route technique by the corner. Receivers at the high school level have difficulty getting

down field verses this technique as they are often re-routed and pushed off their vertical line too far to the inside. The technique I will teach here will make it impossible for a receiver to be re-routed in this way!

When a defender leverages a receiver it means that there is a part of the field he doesn’t want the receiver to get to. In the case of this coverage it would be releasing to the outside of the corner. Any time we are running a vertical route to the third level, such as a fade or a comeback, and a defender is leveraging my receivers, I want them to attack that leverage! In other words, I want them to come off the line of scrimmage attacking the side of the field that the defender is trying to protect. What a corner will do, when he is trying to “funnel” a receiver to the inside, is widen if the receiver tries to release outside. So, if a receiver were to run to a point one yard outside of the shoulder of the corner, right off of the line of scrimmage, the corner will widen to try and funnel the receiver inside of him. With this technique that’s exactly what we want him to do!

I am going to refer back to the technique of running up a defender’s toes here. In this case we want to come off of the line of scrimmage attacking approximately one full yard outside of the defender’s shoulder. Anything less won’t be effective with this technique so make sure you are attacking the corner outside in order to guarantee that he will widen to intercept you and force you back inside.

As we run up the toes of the defender towards his outside shoulder and get to within a yard and a half of him we will stick our plant foot hard into the ground and then slip to the inside hip or “weak” hip of the corner as he moves to the outside. As we slip his hip we will then stack him and “slide” up and out into the area of the field behind him (slip and slide).

Watch Movie 5.1 Attack the Weak Hip of Defender



Sometimes a corner will play this funnel technique right at the line of scrimmage. How we attack him is no different though. We simply attack his outside shoulder right from the line of scrimmage to widen him and then, using the line release techniques I’ve already talked about, club and punch through his inside arm and shoulder.

If, by chance, when we attack one full yard outside the shoulder of the defender, we beat him to his outside then just continue on that course. Don’t try to work back inside at this point. Just continue up the field but don’t get too wide and lose your relationship to the sideline. We want to maintain enough room to the sideline so that we can work towards it if necessary.

Watch Movie 5.2 Line Release: Club, Punch, Press



What we have been able to do here is get past the corner without being re-routed to the inside. This technique is particularly effective if our wide receivers are trying to run a fade route into the hole behind the corner and under the safety in a cover 2. If a corner is successful in “funneling” the receiver too far inside when running a fade into the hole it will be much easier for the safety to play over the top of this route. So, this technique is extremely effective in being able to get vertical into that hole without being

forced inside. We are effectively creating more space to work back up into the space behind the corner and under the safety. I call this a “slip and slide” technique. We are “slipping” the hip of the funnel corner and “sliding” into the hole under the safety. Once we get into the hole we will “throttle” down and look for a throw on a line from the quarterback.

There is a coaching point I want you to be aware of here so that you understand how a defense can defend a particular play. As a receiver it is important for you to know the responsibilities of defenders in certain situations. We will go into depth on coverages later on in the book. On a play like this we will usually swing a back or run a tight end into the flats to hold the corner up. However, if on a particular play, there is not a route towards the flat to hold the corner, the corner will execute what is called a “trail” technique on the receiver.

As the corner attempts to “funnel” the receiver his eyes will be to the inside looking for any offensive player attacking the flats. If he does not see a flat player as he lets the receiver run vertical behind him he will then turn and “trail” under the receiver looking to “squeeze” him to the safety. He will also be looking for any type of stop route from the receiver. As a receiver it is important for you to be aware of this as, when you “slide” past the corner, you must be aware of whether he is trailing you or not. This could affect the route adjustment you might need to make within the system you play in as you certainly would not want to run a

comeback into a trail corner or a fade with him on your back hip and a safety over the top! How we would adjust to a trail corner would be by executing a “run away” technique. What we would do here is turn the route into a hard crossing route at about eight yards, running away from the corner and staying underneath the safety.

If you are a slot receiver you will often play with an outside linebacker, strong safety, or nickel defender covering you. If the defense is playing a zone coverage, most likely, the defender will be playing an inside-out leverage on you. Their coverage responsibility is usually either the hook/curl zone or the hook/curl zone to flats. They are playing inside-out leverage, splitting the difference between you and the end man on the line of scrimmage. The reason for this is so that they can be in a position to play run or pass. If they were to line up too far to the outside, over the top of the slot receiver, it would be very easy to run the ball off-tackle.

The zone responsibility of this defender in most defenses is to “re-route” the slot receiver before dropping to their coverage responsibility. So, as a slot receiver ***you must avoid the “re-route”***. If you are running a pass route that will carry you into the third level and you need to avoid the “re-route” the rule is simple, NEVER release straight up field from the line of scrimmage unless you are working against a defender that is not moving to the outside aggressively! Why? If you do this you are giving the

defender an easy track to “re-route” you. You must apply a stem off of the line of scrimmage. How you stem is based on the track that the defender takes to “re-route” you.

If the defender works aggressively to the outside to intercept you then you must stem hard to his inside shoulder to stop his lateral track, run up his toes and then slip his outside shoulder. If you stem hard to his inside shoulder this will slow his track as he will be looking to stop and prevent you from working to his inside shoulder. You are trying to make him think you are going one way but then you quickly apply a change of direction the other way. With a defender who works laterally very quickly to intercept you, you can also attack his outside shoulder and then slip his inside shoulder.

Watch Movie 5.3 Attack Defenders Inside Shoulder



It is very important to understand that if you slip the defender either inside or outside of him that you re-establish your vertical track up-field as close to your original alignment on the line of scrimmage as possible. If you work too far inside or outside as you get up-field then the defender has actually done his job by re-routing you off your line. A receiver should always break into the second phase of a route as close to what their alignment was on the line of scrimmage as possible.

The basic rule of thumb here is you must give the defender different angles to work against so that he can not predict the track you are taking off of the line of scrimmage. If he successfully “re-routes” you then he will slow you up enough such that you won’t be able to get to the third level quickly enough and you will be off your track. Make sure to use the hand release techniques we have talked about against a defender that tries to push you off-track with his hands. This technique by the defender is often referred to as a “catch technique”.

Down-Field Stemming

The cross-over stem is a technique I’ve been teaching for several years now. It is a technique that I modified from a standard, 45 degree stem off of the line of scrimmage. The method in which this technique is typically applied is against a defender that is leveraging the field on a receiver either inside or outside. The most common leverage technique you will see is from a corner that is playing inside-out on a receiver due to not having safety

help. He will play anywhere from 6 to 8 yards off and 1 yard inside the receiver.

Cross-Over Stem

The common stem taught against this leverage technique is for the receiver to release at a 45 degree angle off the line of scrimmage to try and take away the leverage. I found that the problem with that type of stem release was that versus a defender who understands how to weave, the defender can still maintain that inside-out leverage on the receiver. A weave is when the defender drops at an angle to the inside as the receiver stems so that he can maintain inside out leverage. So, I worked on a way to counter this weave technique by modifying the stem release off the line of scrimmage.

We will use a post route again as an example because it is a good route to run versus a corner who does not have any safety help over the top. Usually, when a defender is leveraging the receiver inside-out and the receiver knows he has to run a post, he will get very apprehensive about how to beat the defender on a post when he is taking away the inside of the field. Yes, you can keep the post skinny and try and run over the top of the defender but that is much more difficult to have success with versus the technique I am about to describe.

What I have our receivers do, versus stemming inside at 45 degrees right off of the line of scrimmage, is to come off of the

ball straight up the field hard for 4 to 5 yards, depending on the depth of the corner. As the receiver pushes up field vertically the corner will begin his back pedal vertically and this is the key. Once we get the defender into a hard back pedal we will apply what I call a cross over stem. How this works is that, without losing stride, the receiver will basically hop-step from his outside leg to his inside leg, squaring up the defender in mid-stride.

Watch Movie 5.4 Stem to Inside Shoulder



Again, the key is to perform this without losing a step and to make the cross-over a part of your stride as you gain ground up-field. It is nearly impossible for the defender to apply a weave once he is in a hard, vertical back-pedal. I have taught this technique at every level and even the most skilled defenders have

a difficult time weaving effectively once they are in a hard back-pedal.

The result of this technique is that our receivers are now able to square up the defender and this gives them a two way go. It puts a tremendous amount of pressure on the defender because, not only has he lost his leverage to the inside of the field, but he now has to worry about the receiver being able to break inside or outside!

Watch Movie 5.5 Cross Over Stem



Once we have the defender squared up we will continue to run up his toes and then we will typically apply a “fade stick” to the outside shoulder of the defender to open his hips and then slide off his weak hip to the post. We will talk more about this technique later on.

Most of the time our receivers will end up five yards on top of the defender by the time the ball gets to them. It’s truly a unique technique and one that I have had a tremendous amount of success teaching. The difficulty this puts the defense in is that they can no longer rely on a weak side corner to defend the middle of the field without safety help. This forces the defense to bring the safety back to the middle of the field which will open up more possibilities on the three receiver side of the formation. This is how one technique, properly executed by one player, can dictate the entire scheme of a defense!

The single move stem is often termed by coaches as a single move. You will often hear coaches say “single move” or “double move” when referencing a receiver that puts a specific “move” on a defender. These “moves” are actually stem moves. We will talk about the single move stem here.

When I have my receivers attack a defender I will always teach them to do so with some type of down-field stem move. Rarely will we attack a defender without some type of stem. Again, let’s use a post route as an example here. Up to this point I have talked about attacking a defender by running up his toes.

Certainly, if a receiver is much faster than a defender he can often run up that defender’s toes and then run by him on any type of vertical route. I would call this a “slip and slide stack”. By running straight up the defender’s toes it causes hesitation since the defender does not know which side the receiver is going to break

(two way go) and by the time he does, the cushion has closed enough that the receiver can usually slip and slide the hip and then stack the defender successfully, particularly if he is faster than the defender. However, defensive backs can typically run very well and many of them are the fastest athletes on the field.

Even the receivers that I coach who run very fast are taught all of the proper mechanics of how to run a route because that is a very lethal combination! A player who has speed who can also run routes with precision is a very dangerous player! When I teach a post route I always advocate, at the very least, a single move stem at the point where we have run up the defender's toes. What we are trying to do here is get the defender to open his hips to the side of our stem. The way we execute a single move stem is to make the step a part of our stride. We don't want to chop our feet or slow down when we execute this move.

When using a post route as the example, as we run up the defender's toes we will start working towards his outside shoulder and then apply a hard "stick step" outside of his shoulder. This makes the defender think that we are making a commitment to running vertical to his outside. He will invariably open his hips and shoulders to the outside so as to run with the receiver. Our stem "stick step" to the outside also becomes our plant foot. As we throw that foot into the ground we will immediately push back off of that foot to the inside. The proper technique here is to then slip and slide the defender's weak hip (his inside hip) and stack him

as we get into the second phase of our pass route which would be the post portion of the route.

The reason it is very important to stack the defender immediately is because, if he is well coached, he will apply a technique called a "speed" turn or "baseball" turn. This will allow a defender, who has opened his hips, to rotate 180 degrees and back onto the outside hip of the receiver. It is important for the receiver to stack the defender immediately so that, if he does a speed turn, when he rotates out of his turn he will immediately be in a trail position. Most of the time, if the receiver performs the stem properly, with the correct timing, he will be well past the defender once the ball arrives. I've seen many defenders slip and fall to the ground when this move is applied correctly.



The double move stem is the same principle except that we are making two moves instead of one. When running a double move stem on a post route, just before the point of running up the defender's toes, we will start to bend towards a point outside of the defender's inside shoulder. This gives the impression that we are attacking him vertically on his inside. Often the defender will start to open his hips to the inside when we do this. What we do next is plant our inside foot hard, driving off of it for one step back to the outside and then again back to the inside off of our outside foot and into the post portion of the route.

So, it's basically one hard step back to the outside and then slipping the defender's hip back to the inside. Each time we plant, with the inside foot and then the outside foot, each step becomes our plant foot. It takes some practice but what happens is that the defender will do a speed turn off of our first move thinking that we are running a corner route. As he speed turns to the outside we are planting back to the inside again at the same time. If done properly the receiver will be running to the post while the defender is running to the corner. It is a wickedly effective move and one that will truly make your opponent look foolish! In the West Coast Offense they have an elongated form of this double move route called the "Eat Em Up Post" or the "Dino Post"! Basically, it's a post/corner/post.

Down-Field Stemming Strategy

Down field stemming can be applied in many different ways and with several different routes. It is important that you mix it up when using these techniques. You wouldn't want to always throw a single move stem to the post on a defender as he will eventually figure out what you are doing and be expecting it. That's when you want to change it up. Run a couple of single step stems and then switch it up and run a double. You want to keep the defender off balance such that he has no idea what you are going to do next. This is all part of the art of playing wide receiver and it's the part that is really fun! Let me explain the ways you can apply these stems on different routes.

- **14-12 Comeback**- run an inside stem, back to the outside and then comeback. This is basically a post step back to an outside vertical and then running the comeback.
- **14-12 Curl**- run an inside stem, back to the outside and then curl. Or you could run an outside stem, back to the inside and then curl.
- **10 yd Corner**- run an inside stem and then back to the corner. Run a double- outside, inside and then back to the corner.

These are just a few suggestions on how to get creative with your route running and stemming. You need to practice being

deceptive and learn to change up what you do. Always stay one step ahead of the defender!

Movie 5.6 Stair Step Stem vs Man Coverage



Stair Step Stem vs Man Coverage

When playing an opponent that runs lots of man coverage it is always a good idea to run lots of crossing routes. It is difficult for a defender to cover a crossing route as he is typically in a trail position from the moment the receiver releases from the line of scrimmage. I always advocate that my receivers take a hard step in the opposite direction of a crossing route right off the line of scrimmage to get the defender to hesitate. In other words, if a receiver is running a shallow cross to the inside I want him to step hard to the outside first.

When running a shallow cross right from the line of scrimmage (this route typically takes the receiver across the field at anywhere from 3 to 5 yards depth under the linebackers), if a defender is playing the receiver in man coverage the receiver needs to apply a technique called a stair step stem. This is done so after crossing the field for about five yards. After crossing for five yards the receiver needs to make a hard push vertically for a couple of steps and then continue across the field. What this will do is force the defender in man coverage to turn and run vertically with the receiver and then the receiver makes a sudden break across the field to create greater separation from the defender. It is very similar to a pressure release. It helps the receiver to create space from the defender.

Bate Technique

Often, when running a fade route or a vertical route up the sideline a receiver will have to deal with a ball that has been under-thrown by the quarterback. Catching the ball at it's highest point is a common coaching point and it is a very important coaching point! Never wait for a football to come down. We use a term called leveraging the football from the shoulders and up. In other words, any over the shoulder catch should be done so by leveraging the football from the shoulders and higher. We don't want to catch a football any lower than our shoulders. So, if a ball is thrown high and behind a receiver, he must go back to it and then jump and catch it at the highest point.

A technique that I want to add to this coaching point is what I call the bate technique. Receivers must be able to judge a ball in the air just as an outfielder in baseball. He must be able to pick-up on the flight of the ball quickly. A good receiver should be able to tell when a ball is not thrown far enough and he should be able to recognize this within only a few strides from the time the ball leaves the quarterback's hand. If the receiver has noticed that the ball has been thrown high and behind when running any type of vertical route he must not go back to the ball immediately when performing this technique. He has judged that the ball is going to be behind him so he wants to wait until the last second to work back to the football.

What we are doing here is bating the defensive back up the field. If we track back to the football too soon then the defender will have time to work back with us before the ball arrives. We want to draw the defender up field as he has usually not picked up on the flight of the ball yet. At the last second, after drawing him up field, we will stop abruptly and then move back to the ball quickly, catching it at the highest point. The other thing that can happen here is that if we move back to the ball at the last second, often we have to do so with the defender on our inside hip.



Many times we can draw an interference penalty by creating contact with the defender as we try and work back to the football. So, if this technique is performed correctly we will either have the best opportunity to catch the football or we can draw an interference penalty.

Catching the Football

Having the proper stance, getting a great release, and separating yourself from the defender are all important parts of playing receiver but they won't mean a whole lot in the end if you can't catch the ball!

'Playing catch' and learning how to catch properly are two different things entirely. Catching a football is an art form that requires a variety of hand positions depending on the flight of the ball.



Catching The Football

CHAPTER 6

1. Hand Positioning
2. Vertical Route Techniques
3. Hands Together
4. Body to the Ball
5. Route Phases
6. Individual Goals
7. How Bad Do You Want It?
8. Quiz

Catching The Football

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Hand Positioning

My rule is pretty simple; when moving across the field or towards the QB, any ball below the waist should be caught with the pinkies together, any ball above the waist should be caught with the thumbs and index fingers together. Balls thrown over the shoulder are caught with the pinkies together. The hands should form a cup around the front end of the ball and all of the focus needs to be on the point of the ball. We catch the front portion of the ball (point), not the fat of the ball! (See photos and videos below) Ideally, your thumbs and index fingers should form a diamond and the front of the ball will enter the center of that diamond. The fingers should always be spread and relaxed. This is where the term ‘soft hands’ comes into play. A receiver should cushion the football and absorb the ball with partially bent elbows.

Movie 6.1 Proper Hand Positioning For Catching



The catch should be made with the fingers and not the palms. A good catch is quiet. If you hear a slap when you catch the ball you are using too much of your palms. A novice player will also tend to pin the ball to his chest with a basket catch. More often than not, this technique results in balls bouncing off the receiver’s body. By catching the ball away from your body you increase the distance between the defender and the ball, which helps prevent the defender from breaking up the pass. The space also allows the receiver to use his most valuable asset—his hands.

A very important fundamental in regards to catching is to bring the hands to the ball while TOGETHER! I can’t emphasize this point enough! Too often I see players bring their hands together at the last second. The problem here is that if they happen to miss—time bringing their hands together the ball will go right through them. Work your hands to the ball together almost as if your wearing wrist cuffs tied together. On a side note, some of my players have even tied their wrists together with a shoe lace to break the bad habit of the ‘Gator Chomp’ catch. Give this a try, tie your wrists giving no more than six inches between them (use Velcro for a quick release) and then go practice catching!

Another great catching drill (Movie 6.2) is to have the receiver put his palms together in a prayer position when he is playing catch. We call it the ‘monk drill.’ As the receiver is waiting for the ball to arrive, his hands are in prayer position in front of his chest. As the ball approaches he keeps his hands together to the ball and at

the last moment opens his hands and catches the ball. This forces him to take his hands to the ball together and not open his hands until the ball arrives.

Watch Movie 6.1 The Monk Drill



I love the next photo because it displays why Steve Largent, who was not particularly fast, was extremely sure-handed. Notice his catching technique in pre-game warm up where he brings both hands together to catch the ball. His rock-solid technique earned him seven trips to the NFL Pro Bowl and his bust proudly displayed at the NFL Hall of Fame in Canton Ohio.



Body to the Ball

When it comes to catching the football the point I most often stress to receivers is to “take your body to the ball”! I don’t want my players lunging or leaning for a football when they don’t have to. A receiver that get’s lazy will do this far too often unless you emphasize moving the body to the ball. The advantages are huge and it is a big reason why so many of the receivers I have coached over the years have a very large average per catch.

When you emphasize moving your body to the ball, the receiver has a better chance of making an on-balance catch with his feet underneath him. When he is on balance and has his feet underneath him he is much more capable of doing something with the football after the catch! Jerry Rice made a living out of

catching quick passes and then taking them 70 yards for a touchdown. He took his body to the ball better than any receiver I have ever seen.

Let me give you a good example of what I am talking about. We will use a curl route as an example again. Let's say the receiver comes out of his break and the ball is thrown slightly inside. The receiver does a good job of getting his head around as he is breaking down so he sees that the ball is thrown slightly inside and he steps towards the ball. However, instead of continuing to move towards the ball he takes a couple of steps and then stretches his hands out and leans towards the ball. He makes the catch but he is off-balance when he does so he falls to the ground. [Also see Movie 7.8](#)

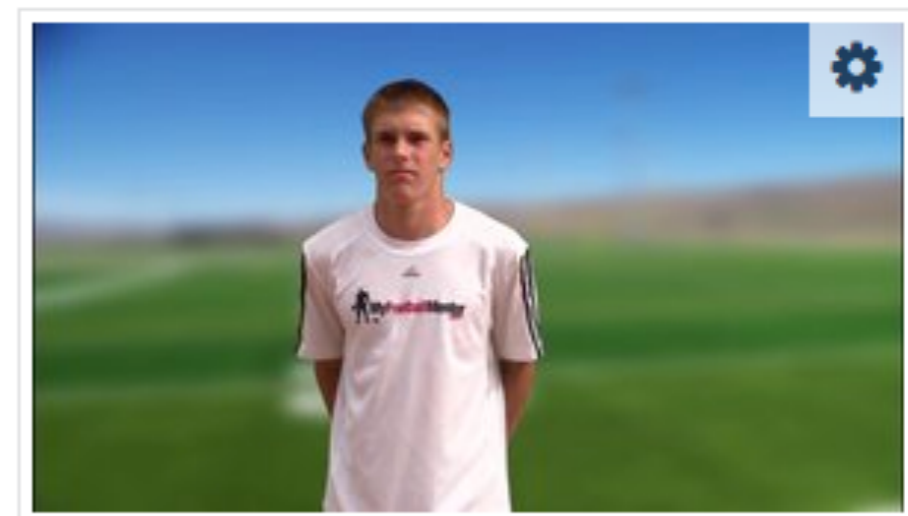
Movie 6.1 Body to the ball & catch at highest point



For whatever reason, many receivers think that they can get to a ball quicker by leaning or stretching out for a catch. Actually, you can get to the ball much quicker if you ACCELERATE your feet and move your entire body to the ball. Receivers have the tendency to relax after entering the second phase of a route, thinking that they've beaten the defender so they tend to "float" out of their break. What they forget about is that they need to get to a ball that has been thrown to a spot. I am constantly reiterating to my players to RE-ACCELERATE out of their break!

Another very important skill when catching the ball is to **bring your hands out to the ball at the last moment just as the ball arrives to you**. You want to 'snatch' the ball out of air at the last second! A big mistake I see players make is they run the last five steps of their route with arms out. This is very common on vertical routes up the field. Movie 6.4 is great way to reinforce snatching the ball from the air at the very last second.

Movie 6.1 The Snatch Drill (hands behind back)





So, to summarize, the importance of taking the body to the ball is beneficial in three ways.

- **The receiver makes the catch on-balance, with his feet under him which makes it much easier to do something with the ball after the catch.**
- **A receiver who uses his feet and accelerates his body to the ball can get to a poorly thrown ball much faster than he can if he were to lean or stretch for the ball.**

- **A receiver can maintain or sometimes increase the cushion he has created on a defender that he has beaten in the first phase of a route.**

Vertical Route Techniques

When a receiver runs any type of vertical route where he will be catching the ball over his shoulder there are a couple of key techniques he needs to become good at. For example, if the receiver is running a fade or go route off a five step drop by the QB he needs to do nothing but run as fast as possible for at least 15-20 yards down field. Many receivers will turn and look back after only about 10 yards. The problem with this is that when they turn and look this soon it slows them down. It is not possible for the QB to get the ball in the air off a five step drop by the time the receiver has covered 10 yards. The receiver's primary goal for the first 15 to 20 yards is to run as fast as possible and beat the defender. Once the receiver has beaten the defender and he reaches the 15 to 20 yard landmark he can then start to expect the ball to be in the air.

When a receiver looks back for a long throw on a vertical route such as fade or go route he needs to do so without jerking his head all the way to the inside. When a receiver jerks his head like that it will bring his shoulders around as well and this will slow him down substantially. Many times you will see a receiver slow down on a route like this and then the ball sails over his head. This is typically the reason that happens!

The proper technique is for the receiver to gradually rotate his head but not turn it all the way to the inside. He needs to catch a peek of the ball with his inside eye and maintain his speed. With a well thrown ball it will allow for the receiver to stay on-stride, maintain the cushion he has developed on the defender, and easily haul the ball in over his shoulder. Of course, if the ball is under thrown the receiver needs to slow down and make an adjustment on the ball by going up for the ball at it's highest point to make the catch over the defender.

Route Phases

I describe pass routes in three phases so that I am able to make coaching points which refer to these phases individually. It makes it easier for the receiver to understand what he did or did not do correctly when running the route. Route phases are mentioned in the terms at the beginning of this book as well as in earlier chapters but I will go into them in more depth here.

- **First Phase**- from the line of scrimmage to the first break point.
- **Second Phase**- after the first break point to when the ball is thrown
- **Third Phase**- the catch and run

The first phase of a pass route is the most difficult because it determines whether the receiver will get to phase two in time. Variables that can affect the first phase of a route are whether the

defender is in soft or press coverage or a change of coverage after the snap of the ball. If the receiver encounters press coverage he must be able to apply the line release techniques we have discussed and get to the second phase in time to attack the football. If a receiver encounters zone coverage or a change of coverage after the snap of the football he must be able to identify the holes in the zones and work to those holes. A receiver must learn how to settle or “throttle down” into the holes of the zone. He doesn't want to carry himself into the next zone where another defender is waiting to pick him up. We will discuss coverage schemes later on.



The second phase of a pass route is how a receiver converts his momentum from the first phase to the second phase. The second phase is where the receiver creates separation from the defender.

A good receiver will always re-accelerate in the second phase of the route. It's almost as if he is running two different routes and the transitions made from phase one to phase two must be drastic and sharp! We don't ever want to round our routes. The transition from the first phase to the second phase must be dynamic! The transition needs to be almost violent!

A good analogy would be a baseball coming off of a baseball bat. When pitched, the ball is traveling 90 miles an hour in one direction and then upon contact with the bat, the ball makes an immediate change of over 100 miles an hour in the opposite direction. It's explosive and sudden! This is how I like my receivers to make their route phase transitions, explosively and suddenly! This is what creates separation from the defender. When that change of direction happens I want the receiver to re-accelerate into the second phase. I can not emphasize this enough!!! Never, ever, ever "float" or "glide" into the second phase of the route simply because you think you have beaten the defender with a great stem move. The only exception to this would be a receiver throttling down in the hole of a zone.

The third phase of the route is where we attack the football! My players hear me say this often. I want them attacking the ball. They will never wait for the football to come to them, they will always take their bodies to the ball. This is probably the number one characteristic of a great receiver. He takes his body to the ball and attacks the ball. Once we attack the ball and secure the

tuck we will move explosively up field. So, consider that the second violent change of direction a receiver makes. We don't want to make the catch and only gradually turn up field.

My receivers will attack the goal line and they will literally explode up field after the catch. As a coach, if there is one thing you should emphasize when your receivers are practicing route running, it is the explosive move they make towards the goal line immediately after the catch. The more often you practice this the less often they will drop the ball before turning up field. I ask my receivers to tell themselves this as they move to the ball; "catch, tuck, run". It should all become one fluid movement such that catch, tuck, and run looks like one movement in itself.



Individual Goals

The goals that I set for my players relative to catching footballs are simple and I expect all of them to shoot for these two:

1. 17 yard average per catch
2. One touchdown every 5 catches

These two statistics translate into greatness more than any other. I'm not a statistics guy but I've found that these are two statistics that do make a tremendous difference because they translate into two things; moving the chains and putting points on the board. If you move the chains you are controlling the game. Offensively, the ultimate objective is always to score points. By executing the techniques I've described you have a great chance of accomplishing these two statistics.



How Bad Do You Want It?

If you want to dominate on the field as a receiver the best advice I could give to you is to work towards constant and never ending improvement. If you are the best receiver in your

class, strive to be the best receiver on your team. If you are the best receiver on your team, strive to be the best receiver in your league. If you are the best receiver in your league strive to be the best receiver in your county or state.

If you want to dominate on the field as a receiver don't get tired of practicing the fundamentals (like proper catching). The best NFL receivers are known to catch a football over 300 times just in pre-game warm ups! Not to mention the hundreds of catches they've made through the week! How many balls have you caught today? ***Here is where we start to separate the good from the great as it's all about developing rock-solid technique through repetition.***

If you want to dominate on the field as a receiver then you must be committed to practicing on your own. Do you only practice when your coach tells you to show up or do you practice on your own each day as well? There are plenty of things you can practice on your own. Think of all the small gaps of time in your day like; during TV commercials, a 15 minute break from homework or gaming with your friends. Simply take 5 minutes and lie on your back tossing the football up. Practice catching with your fingers as well as looking the ball into your hands. You can do footwork drills in your backyard and spend 5 to 10 minutes before you go to bed at night running routes in your mind or even studying some of the training videos in this book.



I also noticed from the image above that champions are also made when no one's watching.

Predator/Prey Instincts and Catching the Football

Here I am going present a very interesting analysis relative to catching the football. While breaking down film with one of the players I do one to one coaching with I noticed something that was affecting his ability to catch the ball consistently. He was actually closing his eyes just prior to the ball hitting his hands.

So, I took him out to the field to do further evaluations of his catching skills. As I threw the ball to him from five yards away at a pretty good pace he was actually forming a defensive posture with his body on several catches. In other words, he was

protecting himself from the ball and moving away from it as well as closing his eyes. In reality, this would be a natural, instinctual response to anything that was traveling towards a person at a high velocity.

What I am going to elaborate on here is what I call predator/prey instincts. Predators attack and prey retreat. If a person is attacked they will typically go into a mode of retreat or protection.

If you throw an object at someone at a high rate of speed their instincts tell them to move away from the object, put their hands up to protect themselves, and close their eyes.



Obviously, we don't want a receiver to react as prey would when throwing a football at them. We want to teach the receiver to react as the predator. When a predator, specifically an animal, is attacking it's prey the ears are forward, the eyes are wide open focusing on the prey, and they are moving towards the prey. This is what we want a receiver to do, attack the football, and I will often reference this to my players when coaching them.

A receiver should never take a step backwards when a football is thrown at him because this automatically activates his prey instincts. I want my receivers to step towards the ball as this will activate their predator instincts. However, this is easier said than done with some receivers who are attempting to catch a football for the first time so I'm going to explain an extremely effective drill that will force the receiver to be aggressive to the ball.

Put the receiver's heels on a line and then directly behind his heels place a row of five or six cones right next to one another.

Stand no further than five yards away from the receiver and throw the ball at him with a good deal of velocity. The receiver is not to touch a cone which means he can not take a step backwards! He must stand firm and not retreat in any way.

I did this with the receiver who had been closing his eyes and retreating from the ball and something amazing happened. He caught ten straight balls without flinching. What this drill did was force the receiver into a predator mode whereas he could not retreat. It enhanced his focus as his eyes were wide open and he

had no choice but extend for the ball and catch it as he could not retreat. This plays on what is called the fight or flight instinct. I put the receiver in a position where he had no choice but to fight! He had to focus intently on the ball and catch it as this was the only way he could prevent the ball from hitting him.

To summarize, human reactions and instincts are no different than any animal. If you understand these basic instincts, as a coach, it will help you understand how to solve a fundamental problem

Review 6.1 Question:

A great catching drill that forces receivers to develop the habit of keeping their hands together:

- A.** The Gator Chomp
- B.** The Monk Drill
- C.** The Wrist Cuff Drill
- D.** Answers B and C

Check Answer

such as this one. This could also apply to the player who is afraid of contact and goes into a defensive mode upon contact. Develop drills that will force your players to be the aggressor! Once they are able to switch their instincts from prey to predator their confidence will soar and their performance will increase.

Review 6.2 Question:

Any ball below the waist should be caught with

- A.** Feet apart
- B.** Thumbs together
- C.** pinkies together
- D.** B or C

Check Answer

Review 6.3 Question:

A good goal to set for yourself as a receiver would be:

- A.** Average 17 yards per catch
- B.** Average 10 yards per catch
- C.** Score 1 TD per 5 catches
- D.** A and C

Check Answer

Review 6.4 Question

When running a pass route your hands should be out to catch the ball...

- A.** approximately 3 steps before it arrives
- B.** approximately 5 steps before it arrives
- C.** at the very last moment before it arrives
- D.** when the ball is in the air approximately halfway to you.

Check Answer

Review 6.5 Question

When running a pass route and the ball is in the air...

- A.** the route is off
- B.** attack the football
- C.** get your body to ball
- D.** A, B and C
- E.** be patient as you wait for the ball to arrive to you.

Check Answer

Review 6.6 Question

When running a post route...

- A.** I should 'float' out of my break
- B.** I should throttle down out of my break
- C.** I should re-accelerate out of my break

Check Answer

Route Running

Knowing where to be is only half the battle for receivers; knowing when to be there is what separates the really good ones from the others. A quarterback and his receivers need to be on the same page if the offense is going to develop any kind of rhythm.

A great chemistry can be built between a quarterback and his receivers. These great partnerships don't involve waiting for the receiver to be open before the ball is thrown; the ball is thrown when the receiver is still partially covered in anticipation that he will be completely open by the time the ball reaches him.



Route Running



CHAPTER 7

1. Hitch

2. Slant

3. Slant and go

4. Speed cut out

5. Speed cut out

6. Curl

7. Comeback

8. Dig

9. Post

10. Corner

11. Fade

Top 10 Receiver Musts

Route Running

Every football program has different routes and has different names for the routes. I will go over the common routes and exactly how I teach my receivers to run these routes. The techniques I teach should be applicable to all routes even though the routes you run might vary slightly from route to route. These routes are applicable to a wide receiver and a slot receiver. A fade route by the wide receiver might be called a seam route for the slot but it is basically the same type of route with the exception that the slot doesn't typically "fade" the seam route.

Understanding the opponent, specifically the defender a receiver will play against, is very important. Much of this is determined by scouting and film study. Great players watch lots of film in order to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their opponent. A great receiver knows how to use the opponent's strengths against him in addition to his weaknesses. An example of this would be a defensive back who is very fast but does not change direction very well. In this case, using this defender's best asset against him would be by getting him running. If he has a difficult time changing direction this will certainly be more difficult if he is running full speed. So, a great receiver will get this defender running full speed as often as possible before converting to the second phase of a route.

Watch Movie 7.1 Route Running & Transitions



On the flip side, a defender who might not run as well but has a great change of direction presents another challenge. A receiver would be more apt to attack this defender with less movement and more straight speed. Additionally, utilizing variable speed releases against a good change of direction defender is very effective. The bottom line is this, know your opponent's weaknesses as well as his strengths and do so by watching an abundance of film!

I teach my receivers to start with their inside foot forward on the line of scrimmage as that is probably the most common technique in football. Which foot is forward will determine the number of steps run on quick (3 step drop) routes. I teach all quick routes based on steps and not yardage. The reason for teaching steps on quick routes is that it allows the receiver to

keep his eyes on the coverage and the route is run at a consistent depth more often using steps. Here are the routes we will cover:

- 1. Hitch at 6 yards**
- 2. Slant at 5 yards**
- 3. Slant and go at 5 yards and 3 steps (sluggo)**
- 4. Speed cut out at 5 yards**
- 5. Speed cut out at 10 yards**
- 6. Curl at 12 yards back to 10 yards**
- 7. Comeback at 14 yards back to 11 yards**
- 8. Dig route at 10 yards to 15 yards and across at 15**
- 9. Post route at 10 yards**
- 10. Corner route at 10 yards**
- 11. Fade route off 5 step drop**

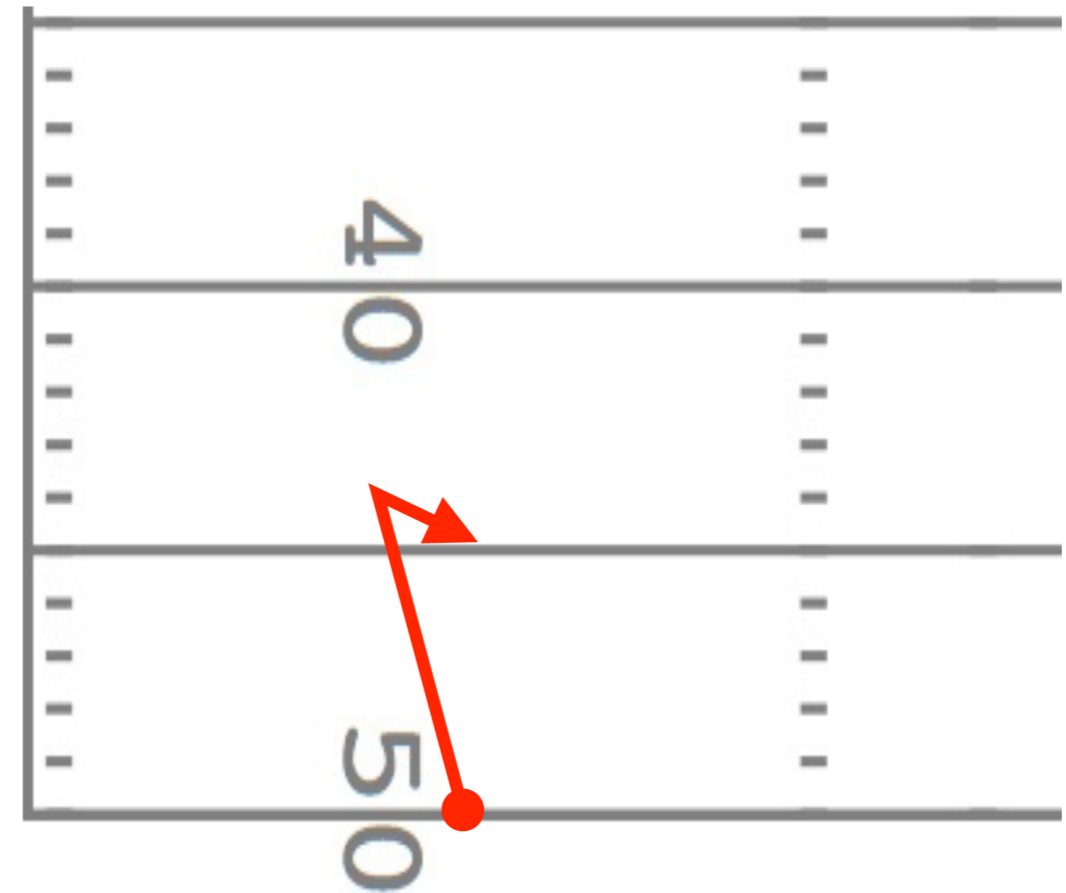
When running the following pass routes I will describe, a receiver MUST be able to run the routes with inside and outside releases versus press coverage. A receiver should never get in the habit of always releasing to the outside on an outside breaking route and releasing to the inside on an inside breaking route. This is a very easy tendency for an opponent to pick up on when studying film!

Hitch Route (stop route)

Vs. Zone

The hitch route is a quick route that is a vertical push and stop up to about six yards. The quarterback takes a three step drop when throwing this route. I teach my receivers to attack the defender's outside shoulder as he pushes up field. The reason for this is that if the defender is playing a soft man coverage this technique will have the tendency to get the defender to start thinking there could be a deeper route run behind him off of his outside shoulder such as a go or fade route.

Watch Movie 7.2 Hitch Route



Hitch at 6 yards

Sometimes a receiver can get the defender to open his hips to the outside when attacking his outside shoulder like this. That will make it much more difficult for the defender to plant and drive on the route if his hips open.

Another benefit of attacking the outside shoulder of the defender is that it will give the receiver more room to work back to the ball without losing his alignment relationship to the inside of the field.

Lastly, when attacking the outside shoulder of the corner in a cover 3 zone, this allows us to widen the route and work away from the flat defender, typically a linebacker, who can work into the throwing lane.

At the snap of the ball the receiver comes off of the line of scrimmage full speed. You must come off the line of scrimmage with a tremendous burst as we want to get the defender into a hard back pedal as soon as possible. I teach this route on steps, two big steps and three set-up steps. This works with all receivers because it is such a short distance and stride length doesn't come into play as it would in a longer route. As the receiver comes to his third step (outside foot) he begins the break-down process of pumping the arms, bending his knees, lowering his hips, and turning his head to the inside to locate the ball. This happens in a split second so getting the head around at this point does not key the defender and it helps the receiver to locate the ball as he pushes off his pivot foot.

The third step of the set-up steps becomes the pivot plant foot (outside foot). By the time the receiver gets to this step he should be under control and not be moving up field any further. The receiver should plant this foot at a 45 degree angle (pivot) to the inside which will facilitate the opening of the hips to the inside of the field. His head has already turned inside to locate the throw.

As the pivot plant foot is planted solidly into the ground the receiver should pop off of this foot at the same time and push one

step towards the ball. Since he has already located the throw by getting his head around, he can now step in the direction necessary to move towards the ball whether that is right at him, to his inside shoulder, or to his outside shoulder. This step towards the ball helps the receiver to maintain a cushion on a defender who might be driving on the route.

Too often I see a receiver run this route by lazily turning around and not taking a step towards the ball and many times he is still moving backwards as the ball arrives. When performed like this the receiver is not maintaining a cushion on the defender so he is often tackled immediately or the defender makes a play on the ball.

By stepping to the ball and maintaining a cushion on the defender it allows the receiver to make an uncontested catch. I then advocate that my receivers take an immediate step to the inside and then push off this foot back to the outside. This is an inside-outside move after the catch. The defender will usually be driving on the receiver in the direction of his initial step inside. If the receiver steps inside after the catch, drawing the defender that direction, and then immediately pushes back outside off that step he will often slip the tackle and be off to the races down the sideline! Of course, the catch should always be made with the hands extended out towards the ball and then the ball should be pulled back into a tuck immediately into the inside arm with **five points of pressure**.

As the receiver rolls back outside on this inside-outside move, the ball will automatically be in the correct, outside arm when advancing up-field. Ball placement to the inside arm on this route and catch keeps the body of the receiver between the ball and the defender if the defender is able to make a tackle right at the point of the catch.



Vs. Press

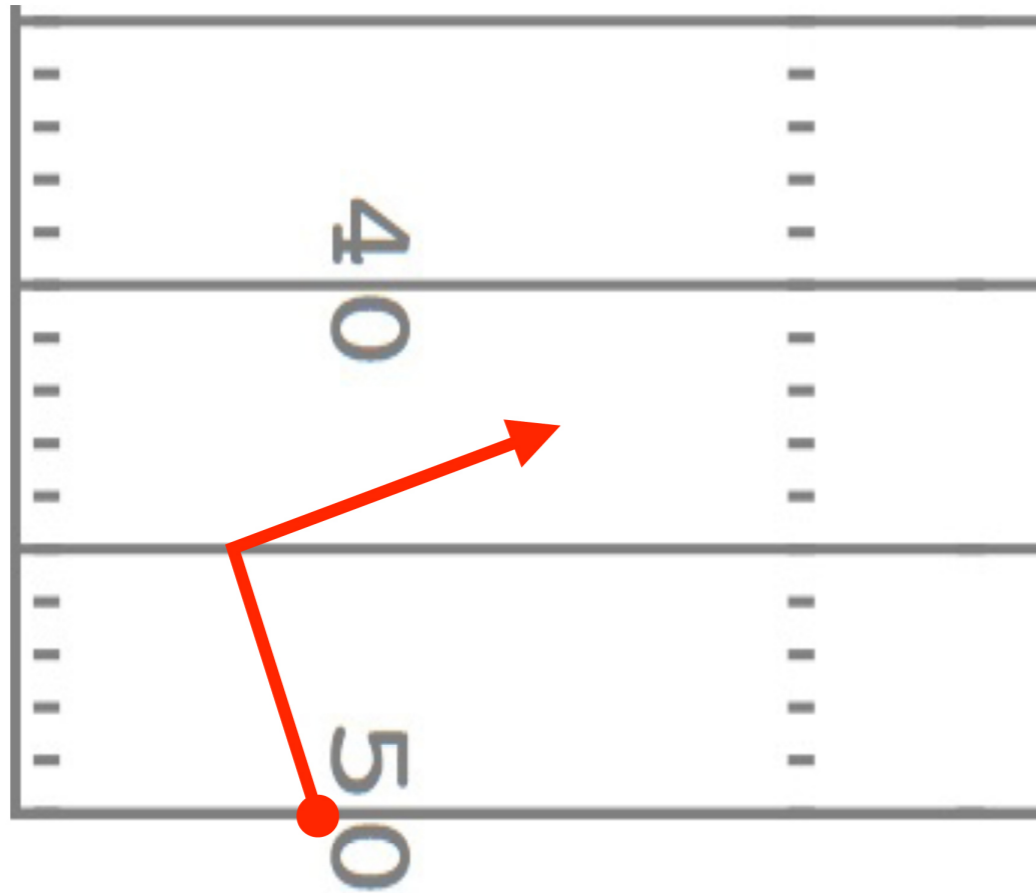
In most systems a hitch is almost always converted to a fade versus press-man.

Slant Route

Vs. Zone

The slant route is often used to exploit a defender who is playing further away from the receiver, so a quick pass is able to be completed. This route is used frequently in the West Coast system, where quick, accurate throwing is key.

The very first characteristic of the slant route that I teach my players is to make sure and run this route at a 45 angle out of the break. The reason we want to stay at a shallow, 45 degree angle is so that we do not work up-field towards the safety. As in the hitch, we will attack the outside shoulder of the defender. This widens our attack and gives more room to work back into the hole in a zone. As with the hitch, we are hoping to open the defender's hips to the outside if he is playing a soft man coverage. This particular route is run off of three steps. The 45 degree transition is difficult for some receivers, particularly when attacking the outside shoulder of the defender. So, what I advocate is running the route with high knee action and quick arm action to simulate coming off the line of scrimmage full speed. In actuality, the receiver is 3/4 speed so that he can more easily control his 45 degree transition off of his plant foot.



Slant vs Zone

All three strides should look exactly the same and the third step (plant foot) should be a little wider than the other two and we combine this with a head nod to the outside. Again, these are deceptive tactics to get the defender to hesitate. As the plant foot contacts the ground the head will turn inside and we will kick our inside elbow towards our back and our outside arm forward. This

helps the upper body to rotate with the lower body in unison. The route can never be run crisply unless this technique is stressed!

As the receiver accelerates off of his plant foot he should expect the ball to already be on it's way. Again, the QB is throwing this route off of a three step drop. If the ball has not been thrown as the receiver comes out of his plant foot it usually means that the QB is waiting to throw the ball into the second window of the zone, the window to the inside of the flat defender. Ideally, we want to work behind this flat defender and then settle into the zone to make the catch. It is important to stress throttling down in the zone and not carrying the route to a defender in the next zone of coverage.

Watch Movie 7.3 Slant Route

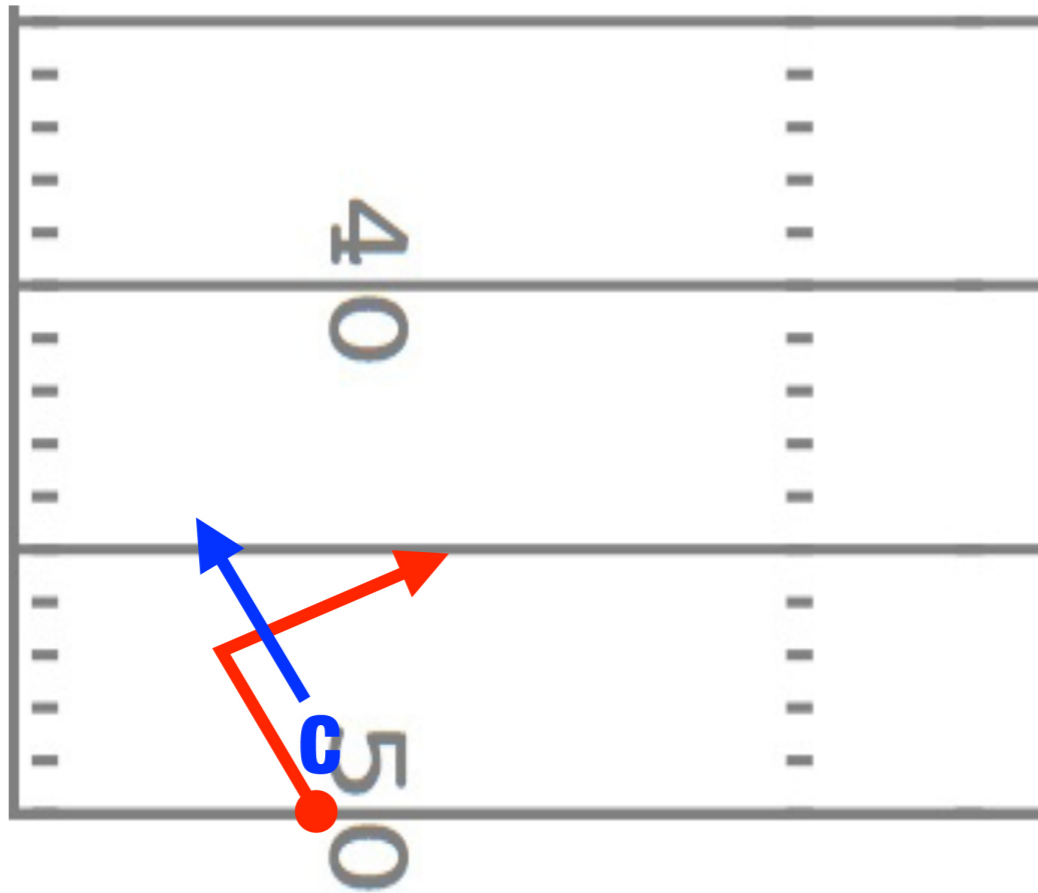


A good coaching point here is based on scouting a particular defender. If a soft man defender is very aggressive to the inside break of a slant route then I teach my receivers to flatten the route even more than 45 degrees. It almost becomes a shallow crossing route. This allows the receiver to maintain a cushion on a hard driving defender as it creates more space for that defender to make up. We do not have to worry about a flat defender in this case as, hopefully, in a two receiver set your offense has the number two receiver running a vertical to clear the inside defender. Additionally, versus Cover 2, we also want to flatten the route to stay under the wide, hook/curl defender as well as keep from running to the safety.



Vs. Press

Running a slant versus press coverage is always a challenge for many receivers as they worry about getting inside the defender, particularly if he is playing inside-out press leverage such as on the goal line. Jerry Rice made a living out of the slant as he often turned an eight yard catch into a 70 yard run! He was by far the best receiver I have ever seen at beating press coverage running a slant.



Slant vs Press

Hard outside release, club and slip under defender

With a defender in press, the receiver wants to take a wide, 45 angle release to the defender's outside, drawing him up and to the outside on three steps. As the defender moves with the receiver, on the third step we plant our foot and then club and pull-by the defender underneath him. He won't be able to stop his momentum quickly enough as we will have him moving up-field and to the outside thinking we are executing a vertical release. I

always have my receivers run the slant release like this against press because it compliments a fade release. When we talk about the fade route I will discuss how we use this technique to set-up a great fake on a fade release. This release works very well against the inside-out goal line defender as they are giving up an outside release.

I never teach my receivers to try and get an inside release versus press coverage because, invariably, they always get impatient and break the slant too early which takes them into the middle of the field too quickly and too far. Additionally, a good defender will jump the receiver's outside hip much easier when run this way.

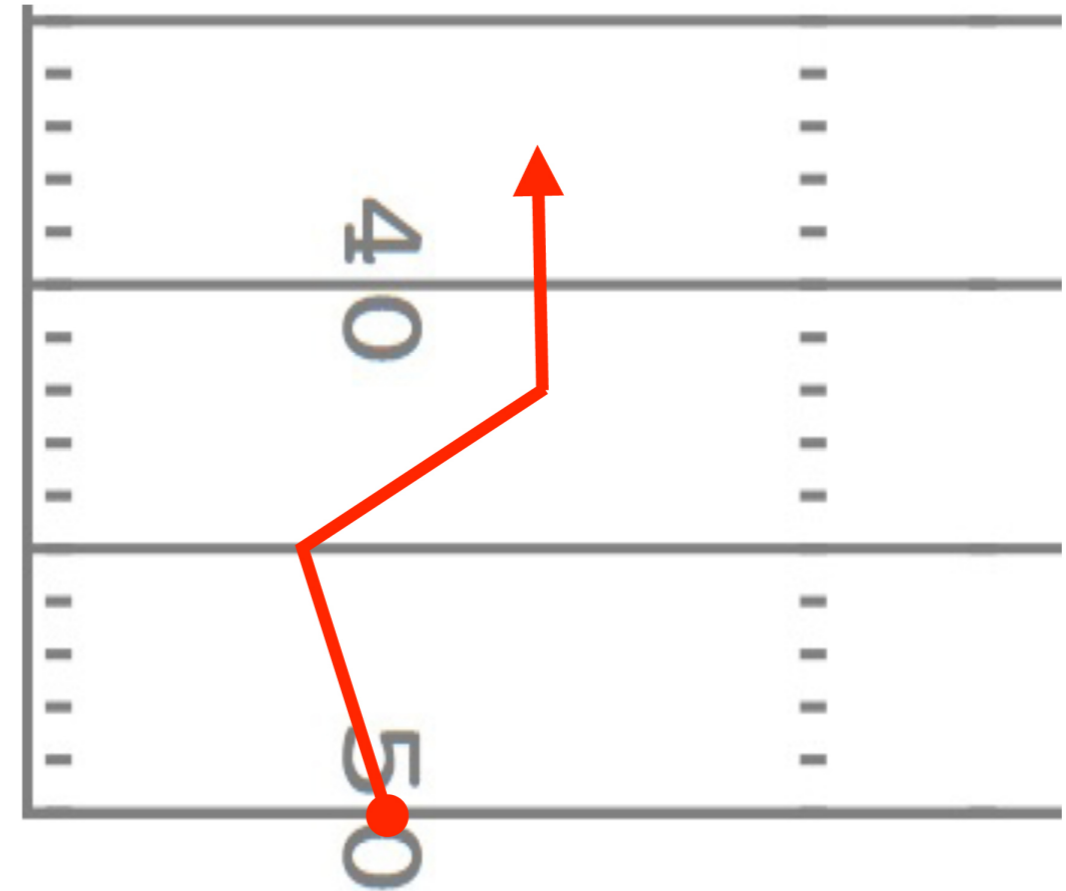
If a receiver must apply an inside release versus press coverage, such as versus a corner who is playing hard outside leverage, the receiver must work inside of the defender and then pressure him hard to the outside before breaking to the slant. The receiver must make sure he does not get forced to the inside too far or too soon when breaking on the slant angle. If he does so he will be breaking the route before the QB is ready to throw the ball and this will give the defender the time necessary to re-claim the cushion he has lost out of the initial break.



Slant and Go (sluggo)

Vs. Zone

This route looks like a slant and is run the exact same way as described previously versus zone until we get to the “go” portion of the route. We want to run this route at three steps and three steps. Three steps to the slant and then three additional steps into the slant with the third step turning into the plant foot that will take the route vertically. On the third inside plant foot the receiver needs to push straight up field on the vertical portion of the route and look for a ball on a line right as he comes out of his break. We need to stay vertical on this portion of the route as we do not want to work into a safety.

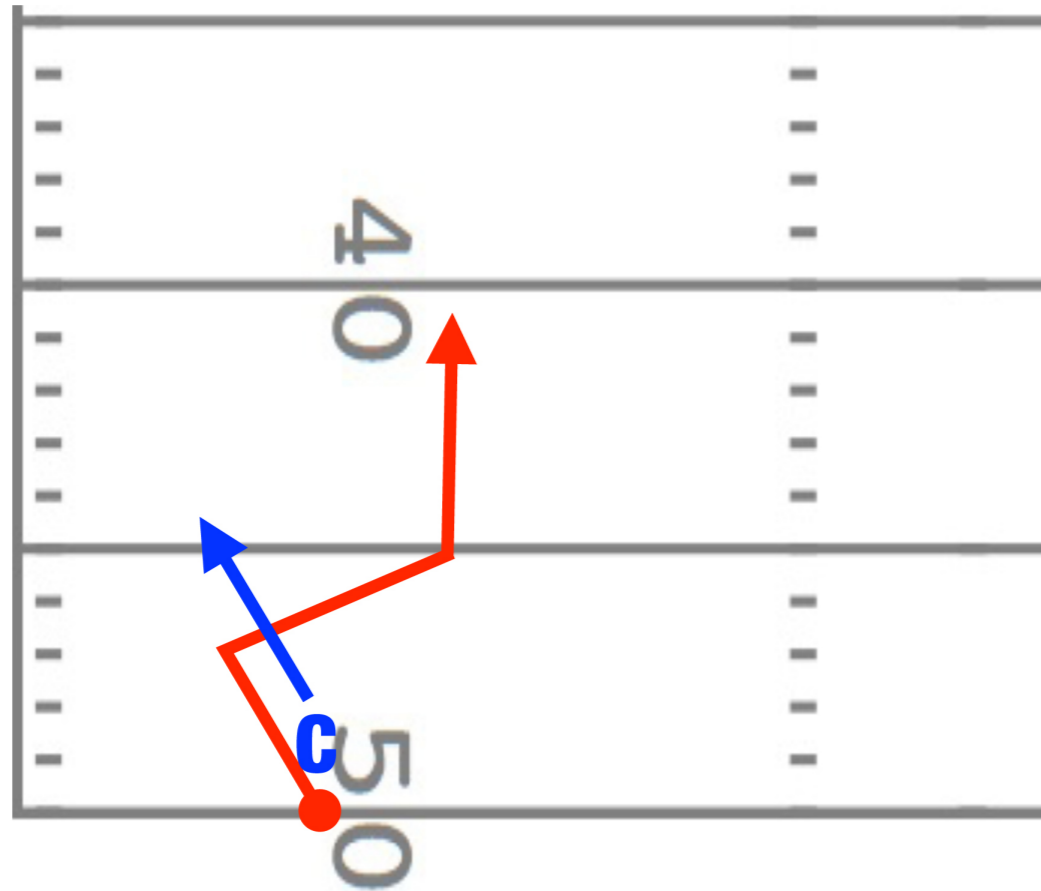


Sluggo vs Zone

Vs. Press

The release is exactly as described for a slant versus man. On the portion of the route where we turn up-field we want to make sure that the defender is on our outside shoulder so that we are between the ball and the defender. Typically, if run with precision, the receiver will be well on top of the defender. Again, we want to make sure that we stack the defender and get him into a trail

position if possible. The same pressure technique should be applied on the slant portion of the route when executing an inside release off the line of scrimmage.



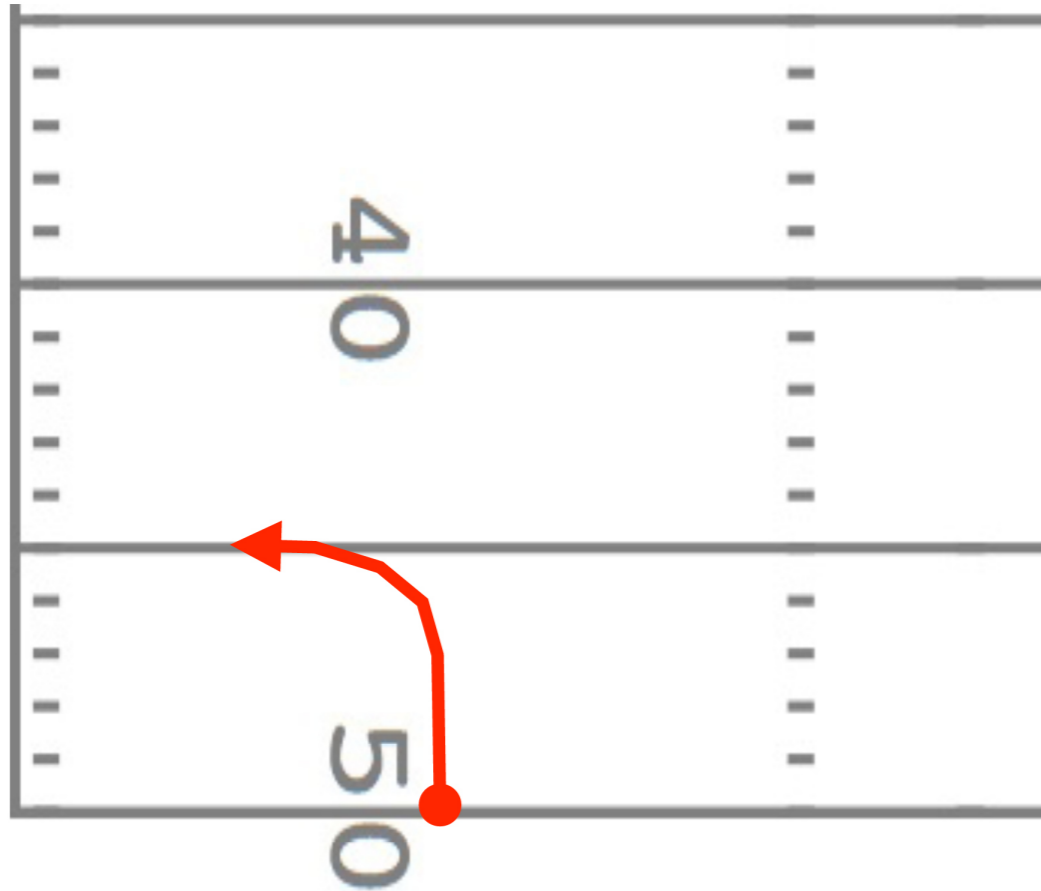
Sluggo vs Press

Hard outside release, club and slip under defender, stack vertically

Speed Cut Out at 5 Yards

Vs. Zone

The idea of a speed cut is exactly as it sounds. The receiver wants to be able to maintain as much speed as possible when making a vertical to horizontal transition. This route is run on steps which are 'two big and roll.' On the second step, the inside foot becomes the plant foot. As we drive the plant foot into the ground the head comes around and we should drive the outside elbow towards our back. As in the slant, our inside arm should reach across the chest to the outside. As we do so we need to dip our outside shoulder to help our momentum move to the outside. The dip starts us towards the outside and the head around and elbow rotation brings the upper body around with the lower body. As we push off of the plant foot the third step should have the outside foot planted at a 45 degree angle up-field. As that foot goes into the ground the fourth step has our trail leg pulling around in unison with our head and elbow rotation. The fourth step should be flat down the line at the 5-6 yard depth we run the route at. So, after the first two steps the third and fourth actually become part of the route that we roll to the outside on.



Speed Cut at 5 yards

Two steps and roll to five yards

The idea behind the roll is to maintain speed from vertical to horizontal. This route is not meant to have a 90 degree break. It is a smooth, fast transition from vertical to horizontal in order to maintain a cushion on the defender and re-accelerate to the perimeter (towards the sideline). As in all routes moving horizontally on the field, we do not want to gain ground as we work to the sideline! The QB is throwing the ball on a line, off of a

three step drop, and if we gain ground as we work to the sideline it will almost always result in a short-hop ball at our feet.

Vs. Press

When we encounter press coverage while running a speed out the route must change to what I call a “pressure release” out cut. After applying the appropriate line release to be able to get on the defender’s outside shoulder, as we move up field we will lean into the defender to the inside, creating pressure on his outside shoulder. We are trying to give the impression that we are looking to break the route inside. This pressure will force the defender to the inside. The route is now run at depth and not on steps. At 5-6 yards we will use our inside elbow to “flipper” off of the defender. The elbow is pressed against the defender at the exact same time that we break to the outside.

Watch Movie 7.4 Pressure Release on Speed Cut Out



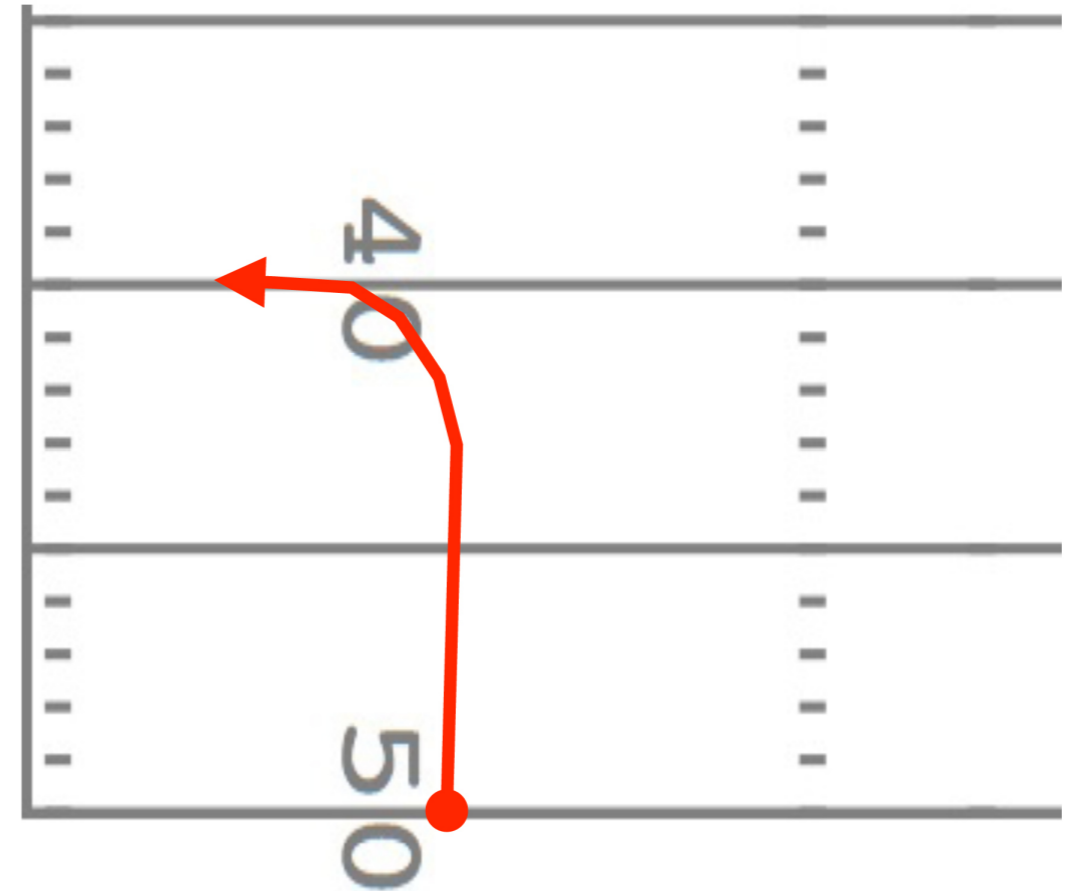
This will create the separation necessary when working to the sideline. Do not use the hand to push off of the defender as this will result in a penalty. Use the elbow as the referee will never detect this subtle technique. It is important to get the head around very quickly and locate the ball as the receiver doesn't have the luxury of being able to roll into the route as on a speed cut technique.

We can also inside release this route and then settle and swim under the defender to the outside. Some offensive systems will have the receiver automatically convert to a fade route here when press coverage is applied.

Speed Cut Out at 10 Yards

Vs. Zone

This route is run exactly the same as the 5 yard speed out except that the steps are four and roll versus two and roll. Here, the fourth step is the inside plant foot and the fifth step is 45 degrees.



Speed Cut at 10 yards

Four steps and roll to ten yards

Vs. Press

The same pressure release technique is applied here versus man as in the 5 yard out with the exception of breaking the route at 7-8 yards. The reason the route is broken off at 7-8 versus 10 is due to the extra time it takes to run the route versus man in addition to the fact that the QB will most likely face some type of blitz versus this coverage. There is less time to get the ball off.

A receiver also needs to learn to utilize an inside release and then settle and swim under the defender to the outside at the top of the route.

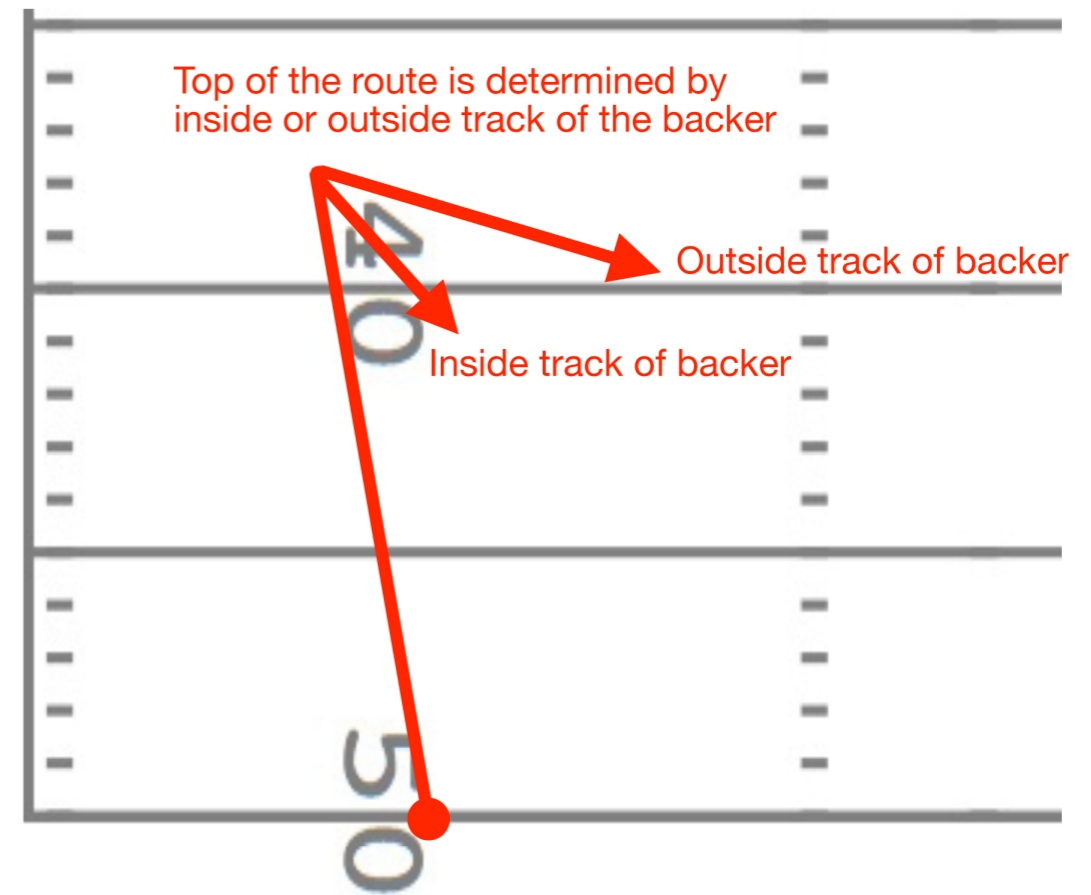
Curl Route at 12 yards back to 10 yards

Vs. Zone

A curl versus zone is an extremely potent route as it is designed primarily for use versus zone coverages, particularly Cover 3 and Cover 2. The key when running this route versus zone, whether Cover 3 or 2 is to find the outside hook/curl defender and adjust the route based on that defender's drop. The receiver needs to come off of the line of scrimmage with a burst and, again, attack the outside shoulder of the corner. The route can widen by as much as two yards from the starting point on the line of scrimmage. The reason for this is that we want to create width initially so that it gives us more room to work back inside and towards the QB without losing too much field to the inside. We don't want to work into the next zone.

At the top of the route (set up portion) the receiver pumps his arms, bends his knees, drops his hips, and attempts to go from full speed to a dead stop in three steps if possible (set-up steps). Since this is a stop route (similar to a hitch), we apply the same fundamentals of turning the head inside during these set-up steps to locate the throw as soon as possible, turn the pivot plant foot 45 degrees to the inside, kick the inside elbow towards our back

and then drive to the ball. Remember to keep the shoulders facing up field when breaking down!



Curl at 12 yards back to 10

Another important reason for getting the head around on this route is to locate the outside hook/curl defender. The angle in which we come out of the route depends on where this defender is. If the defender has a hook/curl drop that stays more to the inside then we will come out of this break at more of a 45 degree

angle towards the QB and work back “down hill” to 10 yards. If the hook/curl drop of the defender is moving more to the outside of the field then we will work across the field behind this defender at 12 yards and create a throwing lane to his inside.

Remember, in zone coverage the defender is reading the drop steps of the QB which, in this case is a variation of five steps, so he will begin his drive phase on the ball based on a combination of the QB drop and where the receiver breaks his route. This route is basically a deep hitch route and should be run the exact same way from a technical standpoint. Finding the wide hook/curl defender is the key and working to the open area either outside or inside of this defender is what will determine the success of the route.

Vs. Press

When running the curl route versus man coverage we can do so from either the defender’s outside shoulder or inside shoulder. Whether we are releasing versus press to get inside or outside or closing the cushion on a soft man defender to his inside or outside, the finishing technique is all the same. If the route is typically run at 12 yards versus zone, versus man coverage the depth will change to 10 yards. If working to the defender’s outside shoulder the receiver will apply all the appropriate break-down techniques and set up steps. Ideally, we have attacked the defender here making him think we are running vertical to his outside and have opened his hips to the outside.

Once we reach our depth at 10 yards, from the outside shoulder of the defender we will apply a club and pull-by and then work under and inside the defender down the line at 10 yards, accelerating away from the defender.

This is called a “run away” technique versus man coverage. If the route is run by releasing to or attacking the inside shoulder of the defender we apply the “pressure” technique that I’ve described previously. We will pressure the defender’s inside and then “flipper” off of him to the inside, re-accelerating away from him, flat down the line at 10 yards. We MUST re-accelerate into the second phase of the route here so as to maintain the cushion and “run away” from the man defender.

Comeback Route 14 yards back to 11 yards

Vs. Zone

This route is, in essence, a curl route to the outside. All the same techniques are applied here but we are breaking outside at a 45 degree angle towards the sidelines. This route will almost always be run from the outside shoulder of the defender. Again, we attack the outside shoulder of the defender as we want to make him think we are running a vertical route past him to the outside. Ideally, we want to open his hips and make him think fade or go. Once we reach the defender’s outside we want to be sure to stay vertical and not lose ground towards the sideline. We should allow a minimum of four yards of room to the sideline. We want to

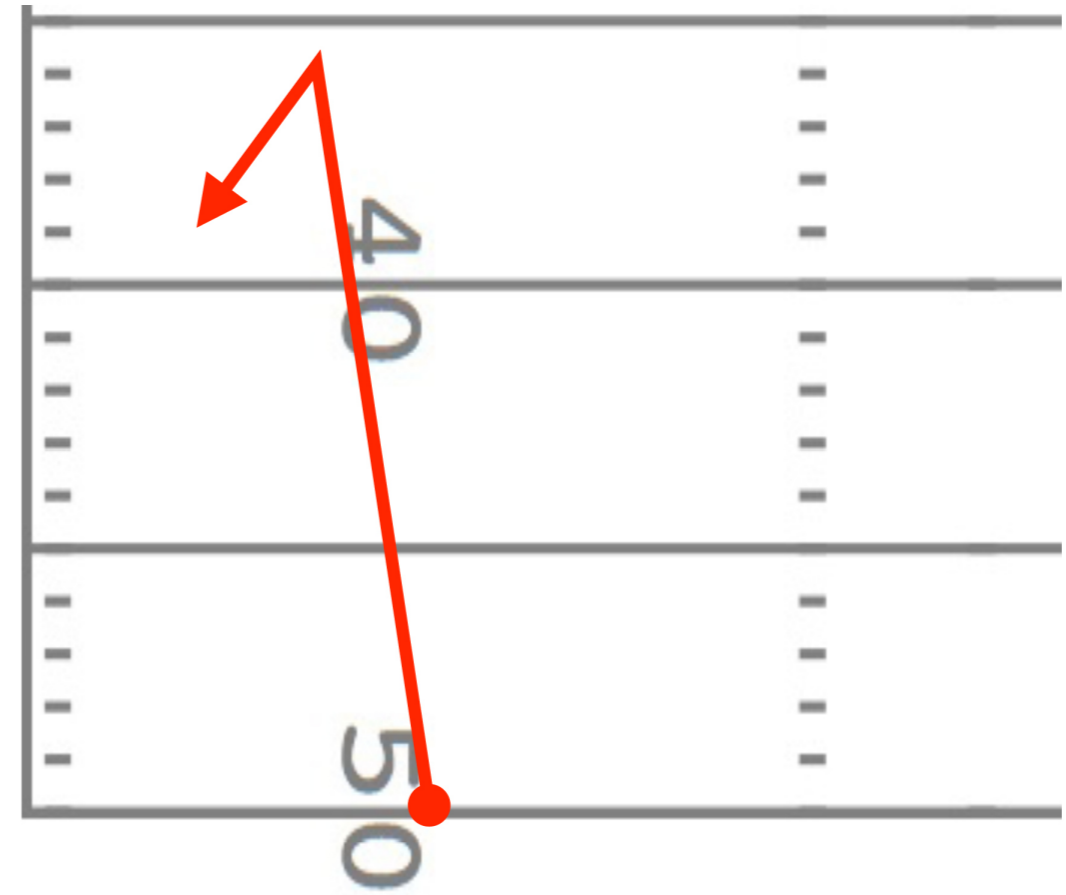
allow ourselves room to work towards the sideline without running out of bounds. It is very important here to get the head around during the last three set-up steps and kick that outside elbow towards our back to facilitate getting the body around.

Watch Movie 7.5 Comeback route



All the techniques, including the inside pivot plant foot at 45 degrees need to be applied. This ball will be thrown off a variation of five steps by the QB and a good throw will be low and away from the receiver at 11 yards towards the sideline. I always emphasize re-accelerating into the second phase of this route as it is very common to see a receiver “float” into the second phase of the route. If a receiver “floats” into the second phase of the route, a defender with good feet can often close the cushion and knock the ball down or even intercept it. This is a difficult throw

for the QB so often times it won't be thrown low and away from the defender.



Comeback 14 yards back to 11

This is even more reason for the receiver to maintain a cushion and re-accelerate away from the defender. This is a common route called when a first down is needed at a depth beyond ten yards or if the catch needs to be made and taken out of bounds

to stop the clock. The zone coverages this route is best suited for are Cover 3 and 4 (see coverages).

Vs. Press

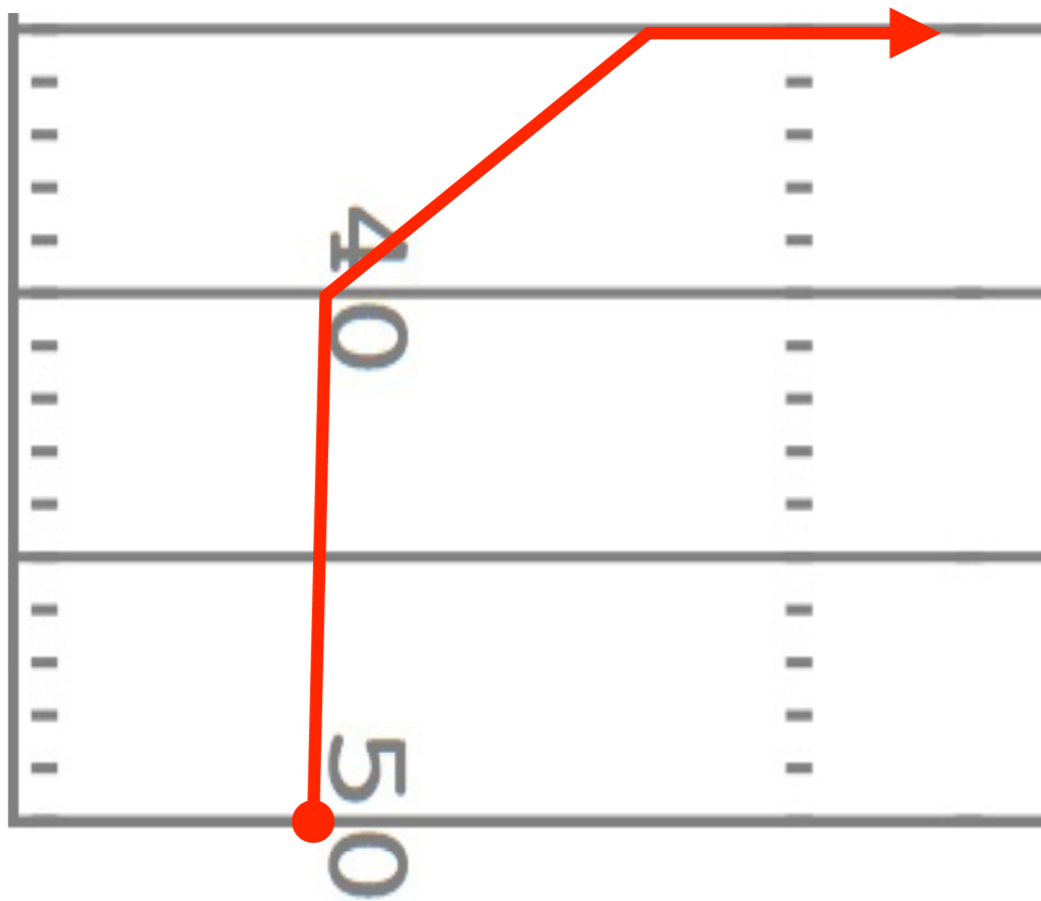
All the same techniques should be applied but we will almost always release to the defender's outside shoulder on this route. The most important aspect of running this route versus a man defender is to actually NOT beat the defender too far up-field. In other words, we don't want to put the defender in too much of a trail position or else he will be underneath us when we break towards the sideline.

It is important to release to the defender's outside but then we want to allow the defender to run on our hip. Once beaten vertically, great defenders can actually play a one step trail technique on the receiver so that they can play a comeback route. A receiver needs to know this and not allow the defender to be in too much of a trail position when breaking back to the ball. This is why it is extremely important to understand re-accelerating into the second phase of this route in particular. With a good trail defender, re-accelerating is often the only way to re-establish a good cushion on the defender when attacking the ball towards the sideline at a 45 degree angle.

Dig Route

Vs. Zone

The dig route is a crossing route to the inside at 15 yards. It is best run versus a cover 3 zone with one receiver running behind the safety and the dig route running under the safety. A dig route is a post angle at 10 yards and then an inside crossing route at 15 yards. The receiver wants his plant foot at anywhere between 9 and 11 yards as it can vary depending on the stride of the receiver. As I have mentioned, when running full speed the difference between 9 yards and 11 yards is inconsequential. The most important aspect of this route is a solid outside plant foot which transitions the receiver into the post phase of the route. The post portion of the route is to get a defender turned and running vertical with the receiver.



Dig 10 yards, 15 yards and Cross

At anywhere between 9-11 yards we will take an additional four steps after the outside plant foot so that our fourth step becomes our outside plant foot once again. What is critical here is to make sure that the post angle we take is not too vertical. We want this angle to be approximately 45 degrees so that the transition from the post to the crossing route is not too difficult. If we are too vertical on our post angle it is very difficult to make that transition

from vertical to horizontal without losing ground on the crossing portion of the route. We want to stay flat and run down the line on the crossing portion of the route without gaining ground into the safety. If this route is run versus a Cover 2 with two safeties we need to settle down in the hole between the two safeties.

Vs. Soft Man/Press Man

Versus a soft man where the defender will stay with us across the field we need to be more deceptive during certain phases of the route. I like my receivers to give a fade stick step at the post portion of the route, attacking the outside shoulder of the defender. Remember, running up the toes is key here. If we can get the defender to open his hips or transfer his weight onto his outside foot during this phase of the route it will be nearly impossible for him to stay with us when we go from the post to the cross at 15 yards. What will happen when this technique is applied is that the defender will usually speed turn back to the post but by the time he does the receiver will already be planting and driving on the crossing portion of the route.

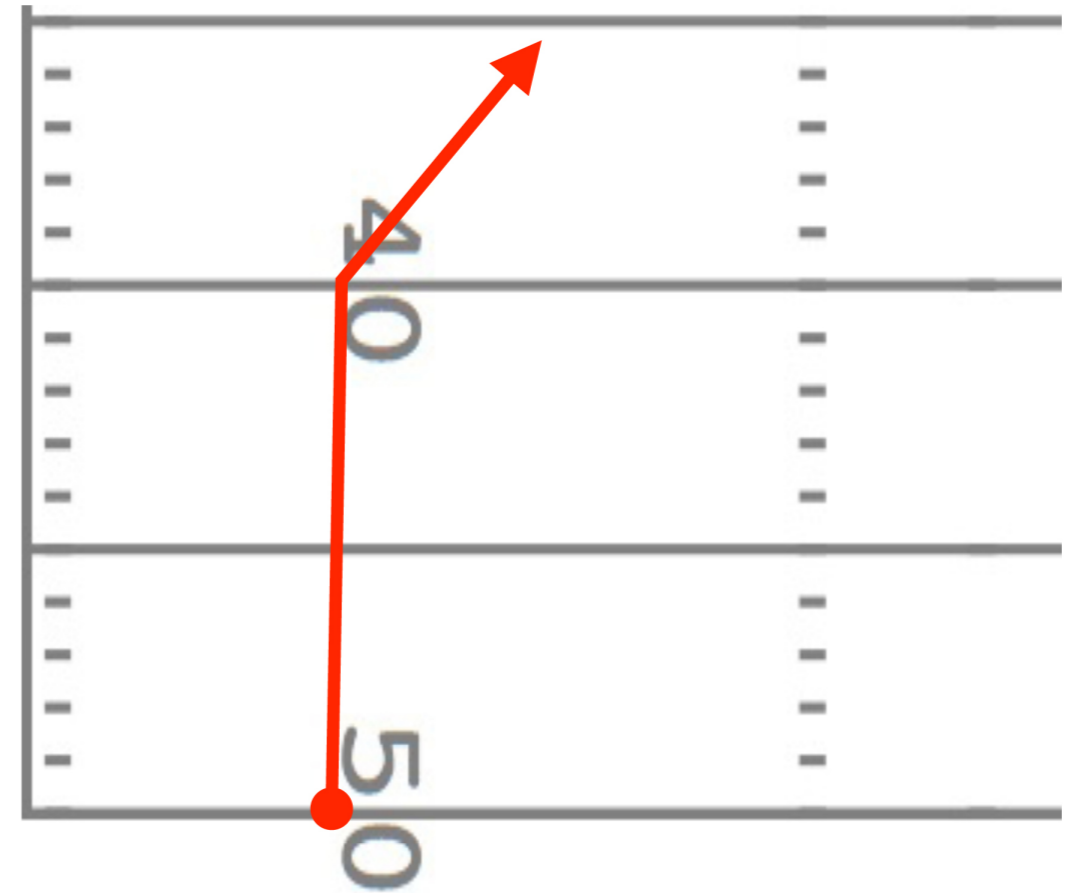
If we must run this route versus press we can release inside or outside. If we release inside we would apply the pressure release techniques that I have described during each phase of the route. If we release outside, we MUST stack the receiver right off the line of scrimmage and put him in a trail position immediately. This is critical so that the defender is not still on our inside hip when we are ready to cross to the inside of the field.

When we hit the post phase of the route we will still give a fade stick even with the defender in a trail position. Why? Because we want him to transfer his weight to his outside foot even from a trail position so that he can not easily run underneath the route once we get to the crossing phase of the route. A defender is in good position on this route if he is underneath us because he is then between us and the ball! That little fade stick at ten yards is enough to create hesitation and allow the receiver to create inside leverage when crossing the field after coming out of the post break.

Post Route at 10 yards

The post route is an extremely lethal deep route when run properly. There are variations of the route, some where the post angle is sharp to the inside and some where it is “skinny” or shallow, more up-field. Regardless, I will talk specifically about how to beat a defender one on one versus the route against zone coverage because, often, even a zone defender will follow a receiver who runs a post break.

I always, always, always advocate either a single move or double down-field stem moves from my receivers when running a post route. I like them to change this technique up often and keep the defender guessing. As I mentioned earlier in the book, the post portion of the route can be broken at anywhere between 8 and 10 yards. The key, again, is where we run up the defender’s toes.



Post at 10 yards

I went into a lot of detail on down-field stems on the post route earlier in the book so I won't get redundant with the explanation of how to run the route. I want to remind you of the use of the cross over stem versus a defender who is leveraging the inside of the field. The bottom line is that we want to create a two-way go on this route, run up the defender's toes, give a single stick to the fade and then post for a single move stem or with a double move

stem, bend to the inside shoulder of the defender, then give a fade stick to the outside and then plant and drive to the post.

Mix it up and keep the defender guessing. Once you've run some single and double move stems and you have the defender hesitating, then you can apply a zero step move by simply running up the defender's toes and then planting and driving to the post. I call this a "slip and slide" post move. The defender will be so hesitant at this point, wondering whether you will be giving a single or double stem, that he will be very flat footed and easy to run by without having to use either move at all. This is the point in the game where you can pretty much do anything you want against the defender! If the defender happens to be playing man coverage we need to either release to his inside and then pressure release him outside at the breaking point or release to his outside and stack him immediately off the line of scrimmage so that he will be in a trail position when we reach our breaking point.

Corner Route at 10 yards

This route is most often run by a slot receiver due to the amount of field necessary to break to the outside. A corner route is basically a post route to the outside. Versus a man defender we attack the defender in the exact same manner as I just described for the post. How to run this particular route versus zone coverages is more important. From a slot position the receiver needs to identify whether the coverage has two safeties as in

Cover 2 or only one safety as in Cover 3. Versus Cover 2 the safety will be covering from the middle of the field to the sideline at the third level. In this case, when running a corner route and entering the second phase of the route, the corner break to the outside needs to be flattened out by the receiver. Sometimes it can almost turn into a deep out route. The reason for this is to run away from the safety. The rule is this; if the safety is high and over the top, the route gets flattened out and is pushed more towards the sideline. Versus a single safety, the route can be pushed more vertically up-field.

The QB and receiver must be reading the same thing as it is typically the QB that will lead the receiver to where he needs to run. If the QB reads a high safety he will throw the ball flatter so the receiver needs to adjust his route, flatten it and go after the football. A good receiver will read the coverage and know what to anticipate but it is important that he gets his head around so as to find the flight of the football and adjust more easily when necessary. The same man techniques apply versus a corner route as was explained for the post route.

Fade Route off of a 5 step drop

Vs. Zone

When running a fade route versus zone on the outside, there are two different coverages a receiver needs to consider; Cover 2 where the corner is performing a funnel technique, forcing the

receiver to release inside as he's covering the flats and Cover 3 where the corner is defending the outside, deep third. The only other coverage is Cover 4 (1/4's) but we will attack that coverage the same as we would Cover 3.

Versus Cover 2, we want to attack the side of the field that the corner does not want us to go which is, in this case, the outside. Why does the corner want to force the receiver to release inside? Because he has safety help over the top (see coverages). The corner will protect the outside and to do this he will widen as his outside is attacked. This is precisely why we want to come off the line of scrimmage attacking one yard outside the shoulder of a corner in Cover 2. As we attack his outside shoulder he will widen. As the outside shoulder of the corner is attacked the receiver wants to run up his toes hard and make him think he is trying to get to his outside. As the corner widens, at the same time the receiver runs up his toes, he should plant his outside foot hard into the ground and then "slip and slide" up-field off of the corner's inside hip.

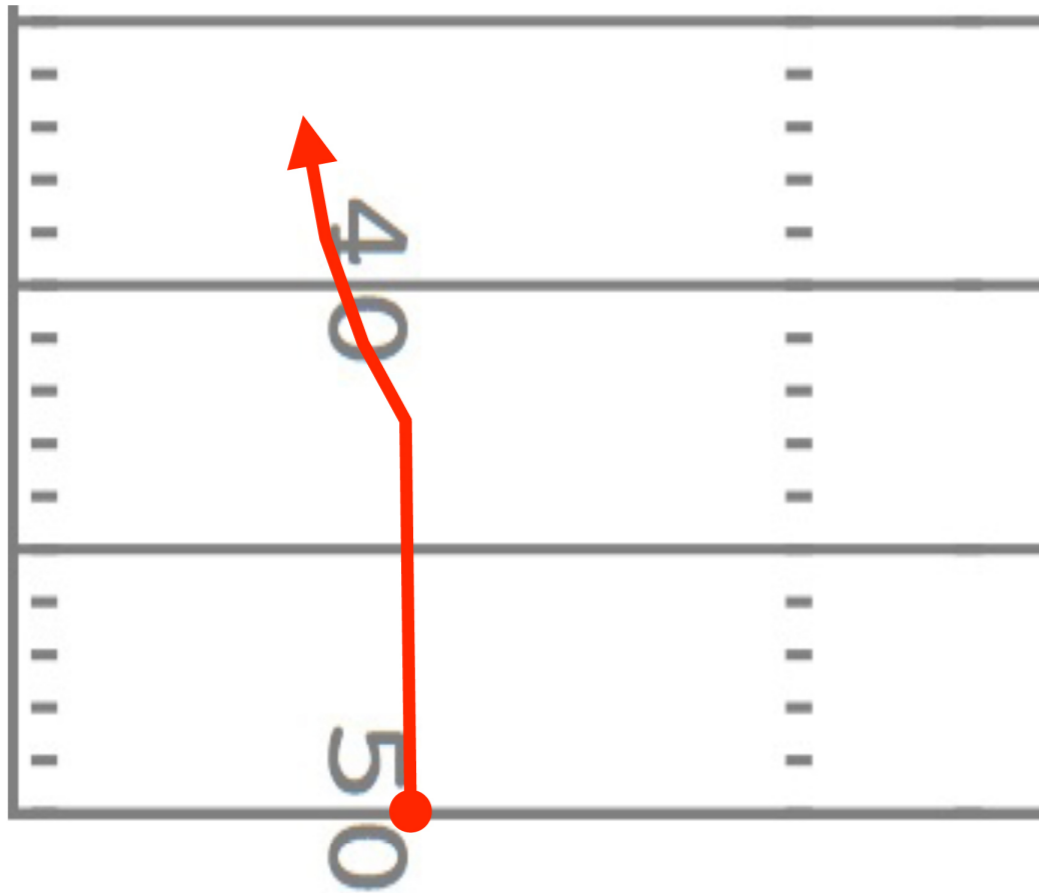
Most receivers will run around to the inside of a Cover 2 corner and this just plays into the corner's hands. The corner wants the receiver to run around him to the inside as this forces the receiver closer to the safety. It takes too long for a receiver to work up and out into the hole behind the corner and outside of the safety in this zone. If the receiver widens the corner and then slips his

inside hip, he can then work up and out into the hole much quicker and much easier.

A receiver should expect the ball to be thrown on a line just as he works past the corner. Often, once he works past the corner the receiver will want to "throttle" down into the hole so as not to carry too far up-field into a widening safety. A play will typically call for an offensive player to be attacking the flats in this case so as to hold the corner in the flat. If this is not the case the receiver needs to be aware of the fact that the corner will play a trail technique under him if he realizes he does not have to cover the flats. In that scenario, an offense would not want to throw a fade into the hole versus Cover 2.

Watch Movie 7.6 Running Deep Routes





Zone Fade (5 Step Drop by QB)

Versus Cover 3, the receiver is basically running a fade route into the zone that the Cover 3 corner is responsible for covering which is deep thirds. Does this mean that we can't run a fade into this zone? Absolutely not! The corner will typically be 6 or 8 yards off and 1 yard outside in his alignment. We need to attack the corner just as if he were a soft man defender. If he is leveraging the outside of the field we need to apply our cross over stem to the outside to create a two way go, run up his toes, give a single or

double move, and then slip his week hip to the outside. Again, once we slip the hip of the defender we need to stack him immediately by working back inside a bit. This makes sure we don't lose room to the outside of the field so that we can still fade to the ball when it's thrown. A fade route versus a soft, Cover 3 corner will always be thrown out of a five step drop from the QB.

A "slip and slide" fade can be applied without any type of move by simply running up the toes of "squared up" defender and then slipping his hip to either the outside or inside and then stacking him immediately after doing so. Once the defender is in a trail position on this route he is in trouble!

Watch Movie 7.7 Funnel Cornerback

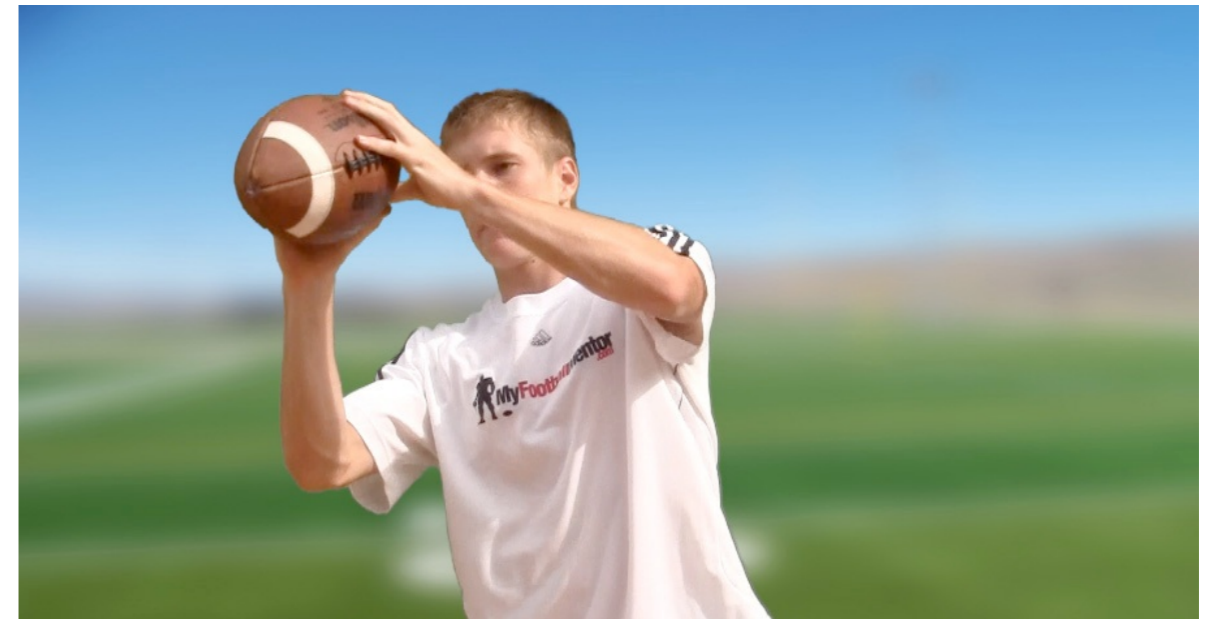


Only a fade against press coverage will be thrown using a three step drop from the QB.

Top 10 Receiver Musts

The following is a list of “musts” for a receiver. There are a ton of musts but these are the Top 10 in my opinion. These “musts” should ALWAYS be executed properly regardless of the system the receiver plays in:

- 1. Always run routes with SHARP angles.** Never round a route unless it's a speed cut.
- 2. Always stay flat on crossing routes, NEVER gain ground when crossing the field.** If you gain ground you stand the chance of working yourself into a deeper zone defender such as the safety. Additionally, when you gain ground you are actually running away from the ball instead of at it. We attack the football so the sooner we get to it the sooner we can do something with it!
- 3. Always stay flat on out breaking routes.** If you gain ground on an out breaking route the ball will almost always short-hop in front of you because the ball is being thrown on a line at a certain distance by the QB
- 4. Always work to the football, never stop and wait for it.** Again, we ATTACK the ball!



Watch Movie 7.8 Attacking the ball



- 5. When the ball is in the air, the route is off.** The ball won't always be thrown to the spot you expect it to be. The ball won't magically “curve” to you or stop and work back to you.

Regardless of the route you are running, once the ball is in the air you must TAKE YOUR BODY TO THE BALL! Again, this is the principle of attacking the ball! Don't run with your hands out and reach for the ball. Be a runner first and a pass catcher second. Once you have moved your body to the ball with your legs, extend your hands to the ball at the last second. YOU CAN NOT MOVE VERY FAST IF YOU TRY AND RUN WITH YOUR HANDS EXTENDED. I am emphasizing this point because it is a common mistake by young receivers.

6. Do not false step off of the line of scrimmage. False stepping is hitch stepping your back foot. When this happens you lose a half a step off the line of scrimmage. Neither foot should leave the ground when you release from the line of scrimmage.

7. Always catch the ball at it's highest point. Never wait for the ball to come to you below shoulder level...period!



8. ALWAYS protect the football with both arms immediately after the catch in case of impact after the catch or an attempted strip by the defender. Once you know the ball is secure and you've broken free from contact, you're off and running!

9. Always TAP AND DRAG BOTH FEET when making a catch on the sidelines. Yes, you only need one foot in bounds in high school and college but why not double your chances of getting one foot in by tapping and dragging the two that you have!

10. Always maintain contact with a defender when blocking him. Once you have initiated contact, MAINTAIN IT! Don't hit and recoil! You don't want to give a field defender space to move because if you do, believe me, he will take advantage of it!

Blocking

While all of the techniques and tools in this book are important, you can't be a complete receiver until you establish the ability to help your team in other ways aside from catching the football. The biggest of these will be blocking because it's one of the most important parts of playing the position.



Blocking

CHAPTER 8

1. Blocking
2. Consistency is the Key
3. Blocking Versus Man Coverage
4. Convoy Block
5. Crack Block

Blocking

While all of the techniques and tools in this book are important, you can't be a complete receiver until you establish the ability to help your team in other ways aside from catching the football. The biggest of these will be blocking because it's one of the most important parts of playing the position.

It's wonderful that you can run great routes, get open and catch the football, but what if the play being called is a running play? Will you do your part to help your running back or just play half heartedly until a passing play is called? If you do the later, your value will quickly fall as a receiver. Football is all about teamwork. If you have the ability to make big plays that's good, if you have the ability to **help your teammates make big plays** that is REALLY good!

If a receiver catches four passes in a game that is a good day. If an offense is balanced 50/50 between run and pass, this means that a receiver is running a route only twenty times during a game if the offense runs 40 plays. Of those twenty routes he may not be the primary receiver on many of them. The other twenty plays, when the offense runs the ball, the receiver's blocking assignment is a primary part of the play. **A receiver actually spends much more time during a game being a blocker versus a receiver.** In order for a running back to break a long run, the secondary defenders must be blocked down-field!

Stalk Blocking

When stalk blocking, it is imperative that the receiver come off the line of scrimmage at the snap of the ball just as if it were a pass play. If a receiver comes off the line lazily when it's a run he will key the defender. Come off the ball hard and get the defender into a back pedal as quickly as possible. We want to be able to set up the block as far down field as possible as this is just extra yards for the running back. A receiver must 'break down' in time to make the block. This is the most common mistake I see young receivers make, they do not break down in time and the defender is able to run right by them.

Watch Movie 8.1 Stalk Blocking



The key is to break down on the defender with a three yard cushion. As we break down we widen our stance and get ready to shuffle in the direction that the defender moves. Once the defender commits to the ball carrier the receiver should make contact and then maintain that contact.



Notice wide base of blocker (black shorts) as he shuffles with defender.

If you've ever played defense in basketball, the technique is exactly the same. Eventually, the defender will have to make a move to the ball carrier and this is the point at which contact is made. A good defender is taught to make contact and then slip by you right off of your hip. He will often try and push and rip by pulling you to a side. You must make contact with your butt extended, feet no closer than shoulder width apart, and your hands and face mask in the chest of the defender. By kicking your

butt out on contact you stabilize yourself and make it more difficult for the defender to run through you. If you stand too tall, that's exactly what will happen.



Once contact is made you need to MAINTAIN CONTACT! Do not hit and then bounce off. If you do this you will give the defender the necessary space to avoid you again. Also, don't maintain contact by grabbing the defender. ***Maintain contact by keeping your hands just inside his shoulders and shuffle with him wherever he goes (this is where the term "stalk" block came from).*** You don't need to knock him to the ground, you just need to tie him up long enough for the running back to choose a side. A good ball carrier will read the direction of your block and run off of your butt.

Keep your head up while maintaining contact and keep your base wide so that you can move side to side. If the defender happens to pick a side and attack that side then you need to press against his shoulder opposite the side he is attacking. As an example, if he tries to go around your left side then you will drive through his left shoulder by pressing with your right hand. The idea here is to push the defender's opposite shoulder of the direction he is attacking. This will rotate him sideways and knock him off balance, often to the ground. The running back should see you rotating the defender and then cut off of your butt.

I do not advocate a cut block at the lower levels of football as it is illegal.

Let's Review a Few Blocking Points For Running Plays:

1. *Come off snap in full sprint*
2. *Break down approximately 3 yards in front of defender*
3. *Feet at shoulder width minimum for wide base*
4. *Butt extended out*
5. *Hands and face mask in defenders chest on initial contact*
6. *Maintain contact by shuffling with the defender*

Consistency is Key

It would be counterproductive of you to give the defense any pre-snap indication that the play is a running play based on your stance and/or alignment. This can lead to a dead or bad play on your team's behalf or lead to the quarterback having to call an audible since the defense picked up on the play. So, the key is to stay consistent. Line up the same way on every snap whether it's a pass play or run play. Your opponent will pick up on things like an increased forward lean by the receiver on pass plays.



Running Back runs off the butt of his down field blocker

Blocking Versus Man Coverage

How often have you heard a coach say “if the secondary is playing man coverage on a running play just run-off the defender”? Probably all the time. The problem with simply telling the receiver to run off the defender is that the defender will eventually read run, particularly if his defensive team mates are yelling “run, run”. If the receiver is on top of the defender in a run-off when the defender recognizes run, he will often peel back and make the tackle on a running back in open field.

Run-Off and Sift

I teach a technique called a run-off and sift. We will run off a man defender to anywhere between ten and fifteen yards. At that point we will make a sudden stop and then “sift” under the defender as he runs by us. This puts us in a position to now block the defender after pushing him up field. The defender now has to go through the receiver’s block to make a tackle on the runner.

Convoy Block

A convoy block is a back-side block. If a receiver is lined up on the left side of the formation and the running play is to the right side of the formation the receiver will have a convoy block. This can also be referred to as a cut-off block. The receiver will run to cut-off the safety across the field on this block. The key to this technique is for the receiver to take an inside step and **45 degree angle of attack right from the line of scrimmage. He does not want to work vertically at all.** By coming off the line of scrimmage at a hard angle the receiver is actually running to a point well in front of the safety. If the receiver runs at the safety he will never have the proper angle to cut him off across field. Running to a point in front of the safety allows the receiver to get across field at a better angle and it will allow him to cut-off the safety from making the play on the ball carrier.

Crack Block

Most crack blocks are made by slot receivers but this block can also be made by a wide receiver in motion or aligned tighter to the line of scrimmage. The proper way to execute this block is based on the same principle as the convoy block. If the receiver runs right at the defender then the defender will typically work under the receiver and make the play. I teach my receivers to run down the line of scrimmage and then up and into the defender they are cracking on. This assures that the receiver will not lose the defender underneath.

Recognition Rule on Crack Blocks

Another rule I teach with crack blocks is what I call the recognition rule. This means that, if within five yards of the defender he has turned his head and identified you as a cracking receiver, you need to throttle down and apply a wall-off block. In other words, if the defender has seen you coming he will most likely avoid you, particularly if you are flying in there like a missile trying to take his head off! A receiver does not need to take the defender’s head off, he just needs to prevent him from working laterally to the ball-carrier. Again, if the defender recognizes you within five yards just throttle down and get in his way by applying the same techniques as I discuss with stalk blocks. If, within five yards of the defender, he has not recognized you then you can apply a more convincing blow! Do so, however, by keeping your head on the chest side of his body and use your shoulder to

deliver the blow. NEVER, NEVER, NEVER lead with your head as this will result in a penalty and, even worse, can cause you serious injury.



This lil' man is getting some leverage with his butt out, wide base and arms extended.



Understanding Coverages

Football is game of *brains* and braun. If you study and learn the coverages and tendencies of your opponent you will dramatically increase your chance for a “W.” One key to manipulating defenders to the point of embarrassment is reading the defensive coverage prior to the snap. This is what we call a PSR (Pre Snap Read). As a wide receiver your job doesn’t begin at the snap of the ball - it starts as soon as you break from the huddle.



Understanding Coverages

CHAPTER 9

1. Pre-Snap Read/Post-Snap Read
2. Coverages
3. Coverage Diagrams

Pre-Snap Read

Football is game of brains and braun. If you study and learn the coverages and tendencies of your opponent you will dramatically increase your chance for a “W.” One key to manipulating defenders to the point of embarrassment is reading the defensive coverage prior to the snap. This is what we call a Pre-Snap Read. As a wide receiver your job doesn’t begin at the snap of the ball - it starts as soon as you break from the huddle.

Just like your Quarterback, you want to be aware of the various defensive schemes and coverages. An accurate Pre-Snap Read will give you a HUGE EDGE over your opponents. You and your Quarterback’s chemistry will be extremely heightened when you learn to adopt the skill of reading defensive coverages. Your combined recognition, anticipation and reaction is all based upon your ability to see the field and know what’s going to happen before it happens.

What happens prior to the ball being snapped can change after the ball has been snapped as well. The secondary can show one coverage before the ball is snapped and then roll into another coverage after the snap. A receiver needs to be able to read this change as well and we would call this a **Post-Snap Read**. If the coverage changes the receiver must know how to adjust his route on the fly based on the new coverage he is seeing after the snap of the ball.



Many times you can determine what the defensive coverage is before the snap. A majority of defensive coverage's will be given away by someone's alignment in the secondary, typically the second defender inside. Even when the total coverage is not given away, through observation of particular alignments, you will be able to eliminate some coverage's and/or narrow them down to a few options.

Although you and your Quarterback may be aware of the defensive coverage, you must approach the line of scrimmage the same way each and every time so the defense won't be able to, in turn, read what pass routes you will be running.

The Pre-Snap Read process includes a scan of the football field. The purpose is to identify:

1. **The number of safeties**
2. **The depth of the corners**
3. **The weak-side flat defender, and...**
4. **the number of run defenders ("front")**
 - Find the Free Safety and Strong Safety to determine the type of front – seven-man or eight-man. If the safeties adjust to motion, be aware of a possible blitz.
 - Find the weak-side linebacker. This is a crucial read to recognize an outside blitz. It is the QB's responsibility to adjust the protection to handle the outside blitz or allow the receivers to read "HOT" which means to run a hot route (short/quick route that allows the Quarterback to release the ball quickly).

The Pre-Snap Read is only the first step in your quarterback's throwing decision. The QB must identify the primary defender to read "Hard Focus" and determine where to throw the ball. If you happen to pick up on the same read your QB does and if you're not receiving double coverage, through practice in situational

coverage's, you'll know exactly what to do to get open and get the football. The primary defender is determined by the pattern and the related pre-snap read. The ball is thrown based upon what the primary defender does within the QB's line of sight. For example, on a strong side route the pre-snap read must identify the Strong Safety. Upon the snap the strong safety can man-up, cover the flat, cover deep third (1/3) or cover deep quarter (1/4). It is the strong safety's action that allows the quarterback to decide where to throw the ball.

Depending upon the route, the strong safety's action might change the primary defenders read to the Corner or Free Safety. The QB will make their throwing decision based upon what happens in his Hard Focus area and the related routes within the "line of sight"; i.e., does the primary defender rotate, invert or play man?

As you can see, there's a lot to grasp in reading a defensive coverage. If you master this skill, it will help you know when you should run your routes as a decoy, when you should run a hot route to get the ball quicker, avoid a pick (turnover), and allow your quarterback to elude the defense.



The dreaded 'pick off' by a defender is something you never want to see but these ball-hawks can be illusive! All more the reason to master your knowledge of what they are doing in various coverages.

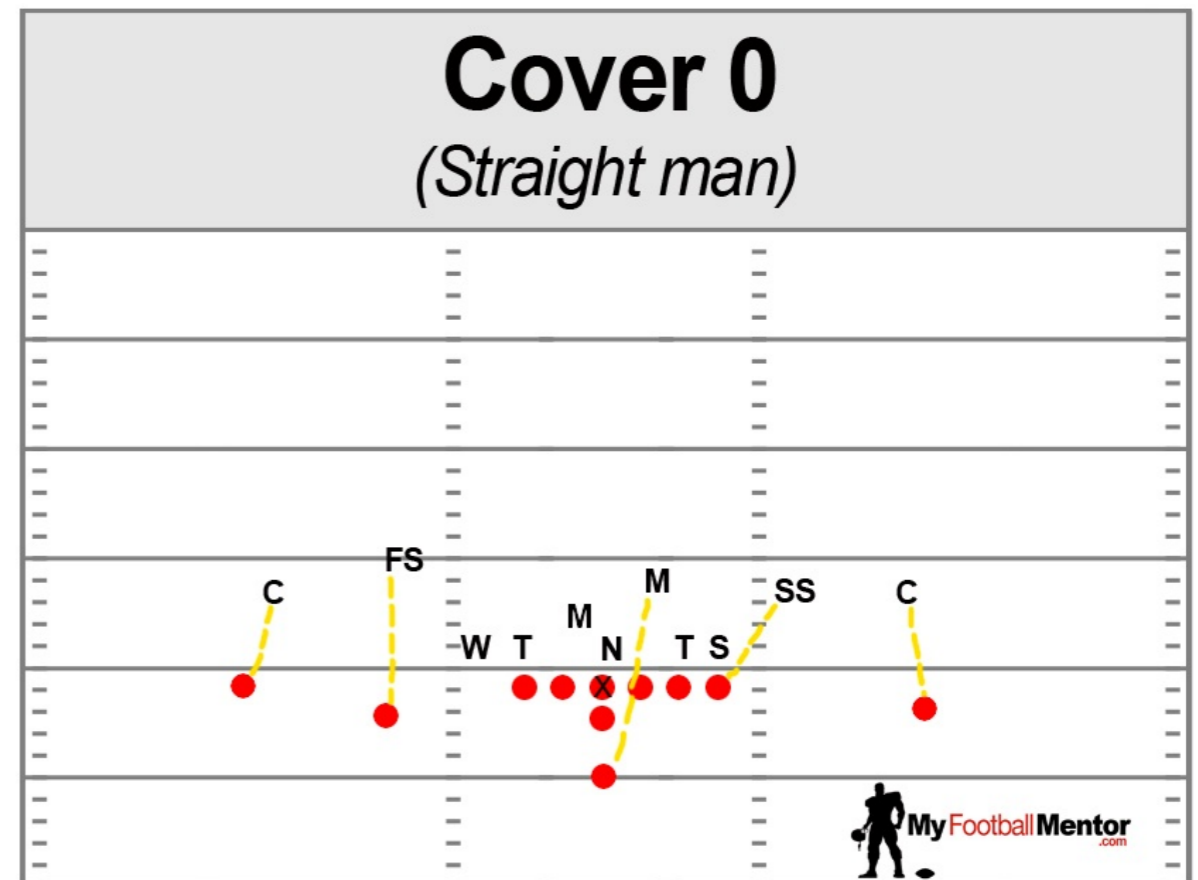
COVERAGES

The following is a list of coverages that you will see the most often at the high school level or below. I am not going to list a bunch of complicated coverages that you might see at the professional level as they just won't apply here. The main idea is to **LEARN YOUR COVERAGES!** Nothing will help you more than understanding coverages and it's the one thing I see that is

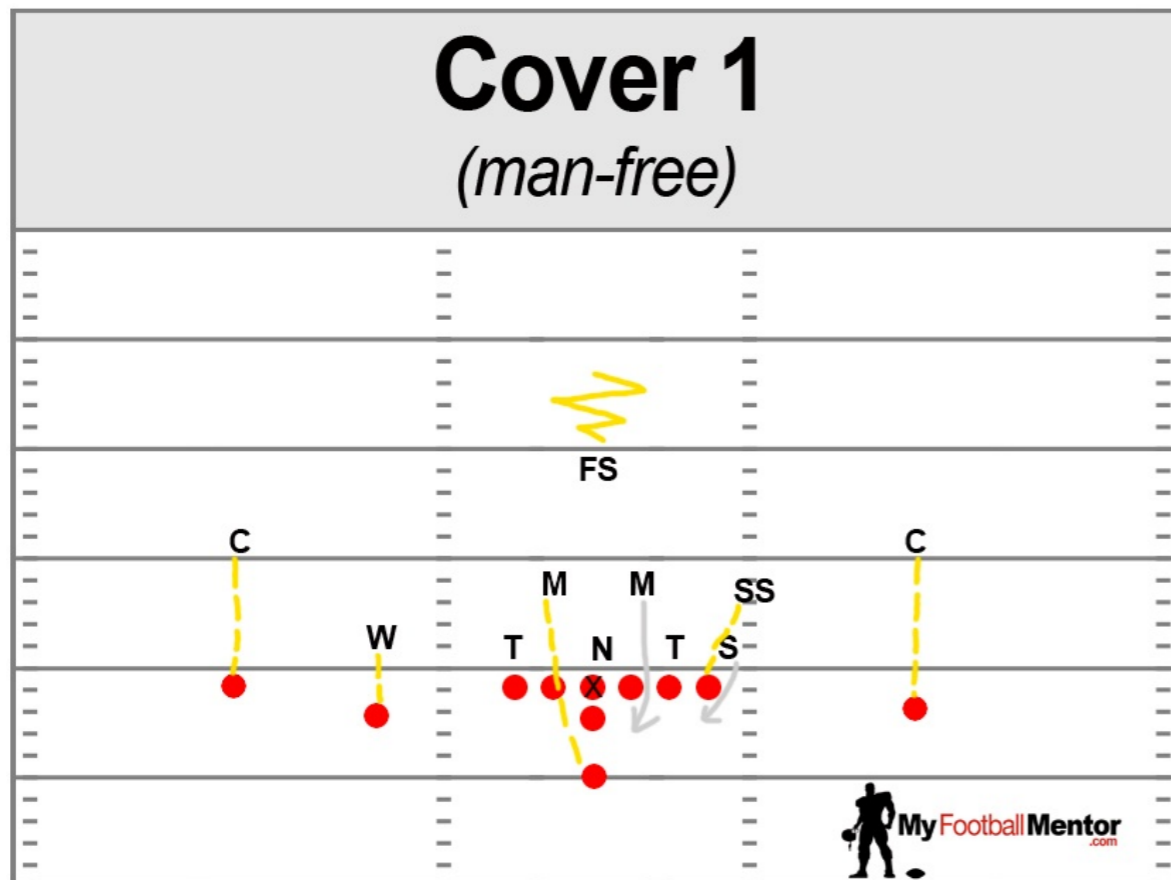
lacking at the high school level. If you know the zones you will know where the holes are in those zones. If you recognize when it's a variation of man coverage you will understand when you need to apply a line release and how you need to attack the defender over the top of you.

Here is a list of coverage diagrams we show:

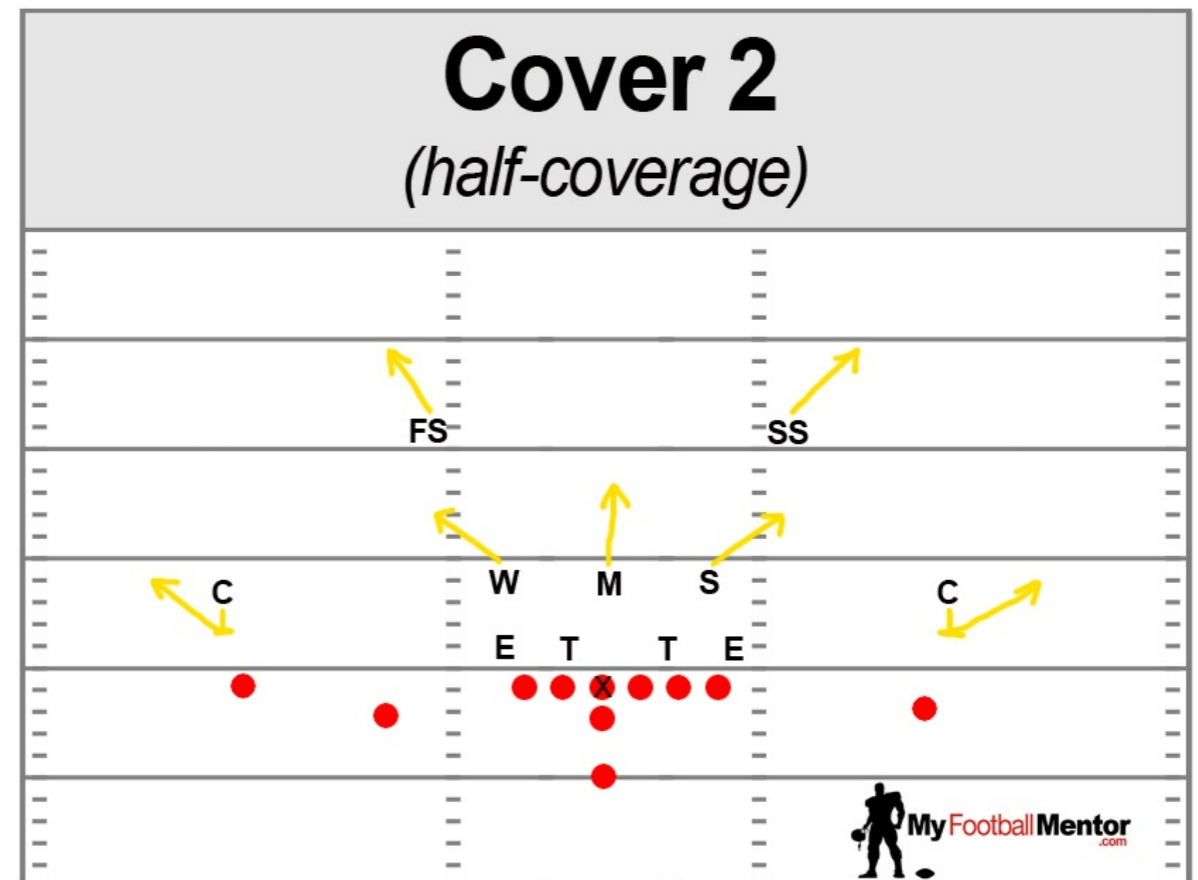
- **Cover 0** (straight man)
- **Cover 1** (man-free) All man with the exception of a third level zone by the Free Safety
- **Cover 2** (half coverage)
- **Cover 3** (thirds coverage)
- **Cover 4** (quarters coverage)
- **Cover 5**- this is a two safety, zone/man disguise coverage you will rarely see in high school so I am not indicating a diagram.
- **Cover 6** (quarter, quarter, half) One safety is half coverage, the other two are quarters.
- **Cover 7** (two-man coverage) Safeties are half coverage, all other defenders are man. Looks like Cover 2.



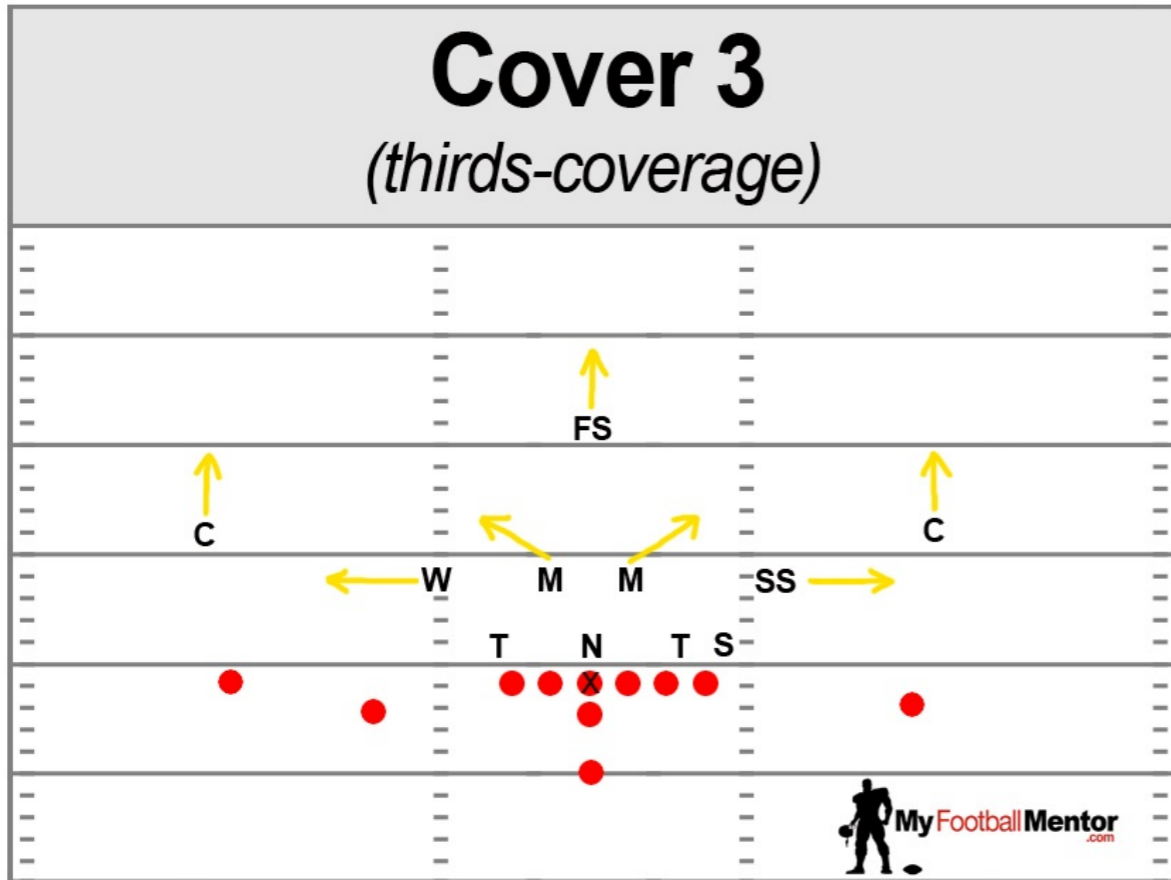
Cover 0 is a straight man-to-man with no safety help. The pre snap read is based on the alignment of the safeties. Usually in man coverage, the SS will play head up on the TE and the FS will play shallow on the weak side. Typically, there is no safety in the middle of the field. We can confirm this coverage by the inside leverage alignment by the Corners on the wide receivers. The Corners need this alignment as they have no inside help. The QB should anticipate pressure from a blitz. The QB must identify whether a blitz is coming and throw the ball to the defenders vacated spot or a crossing receiver; i.e., “hot read”. The QB could audible to add pass protection.



Cover 1 is man-to-man with a FS to help over the top. The pre snap read is based on the alignment of the Corners and linebackers on the receivers. The Corners will be head up or in an outside alignment because they have help from the FS. This allows the Corners to take away the outs. Also, if the SS aligns head up on his eligible receiver at a tight to normal depth (4-6 yards) and the FS is deeper than normal (12-15 yards), this will confirm the Man-Free coverage. The linebackers will have the backs man-to-man. The QB should anticipate pressure from a five man rush, with the possibility of the defense bringing seven.

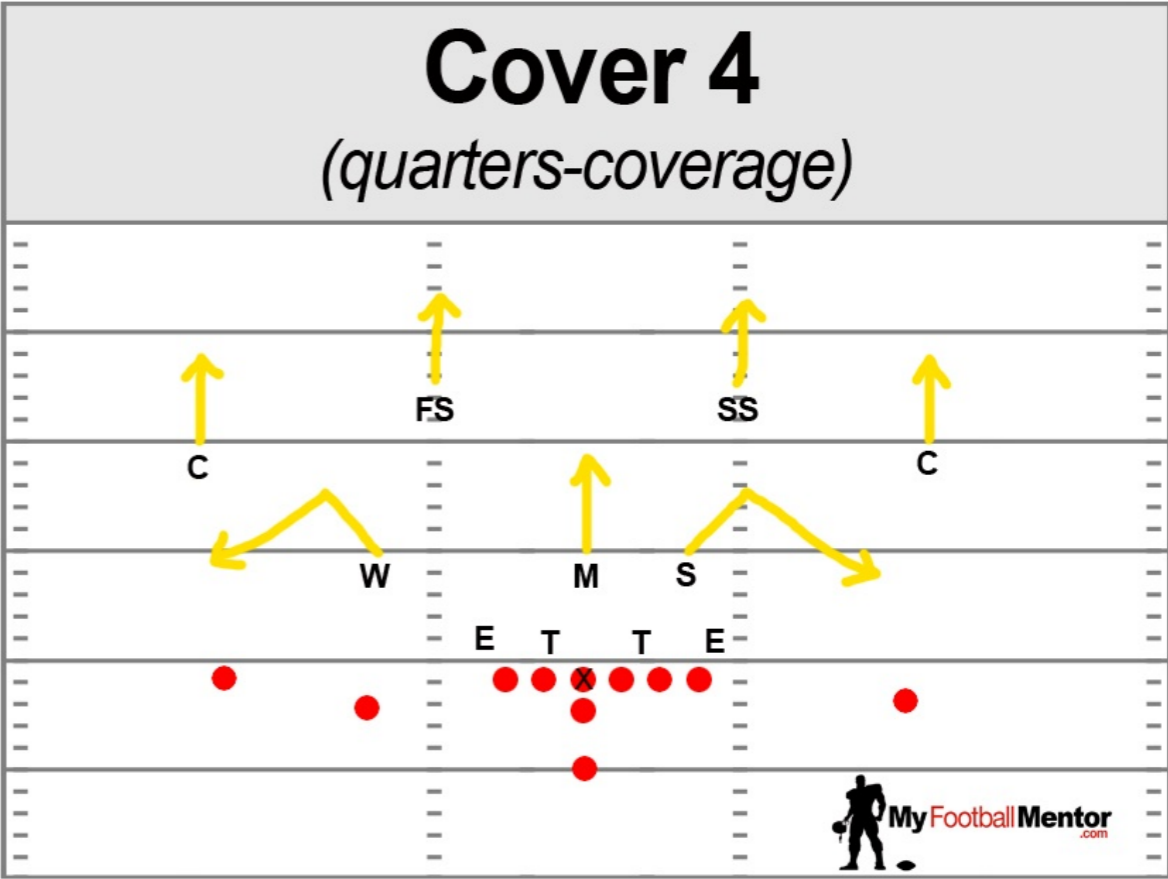


Cover 2 zone half-coverage. The pre snap read is based on the depth of the Corners and safeties. The Corners's will usually be outside of the wide receivers and the safeties will be near the hash marks, aligned deeper than the corners. If the ball is on the hash, look to the strong side defensive back for their alignment because the safety will naturally be on the hash. If the end ("E") drops to the curl, then all six underneath zones are covered. When "W" has outside leverage on the second receiver, assume "W" has flat and rule out two deep, five under coverage and is possibly 3D rotation or Quarter-Quarter, Half.



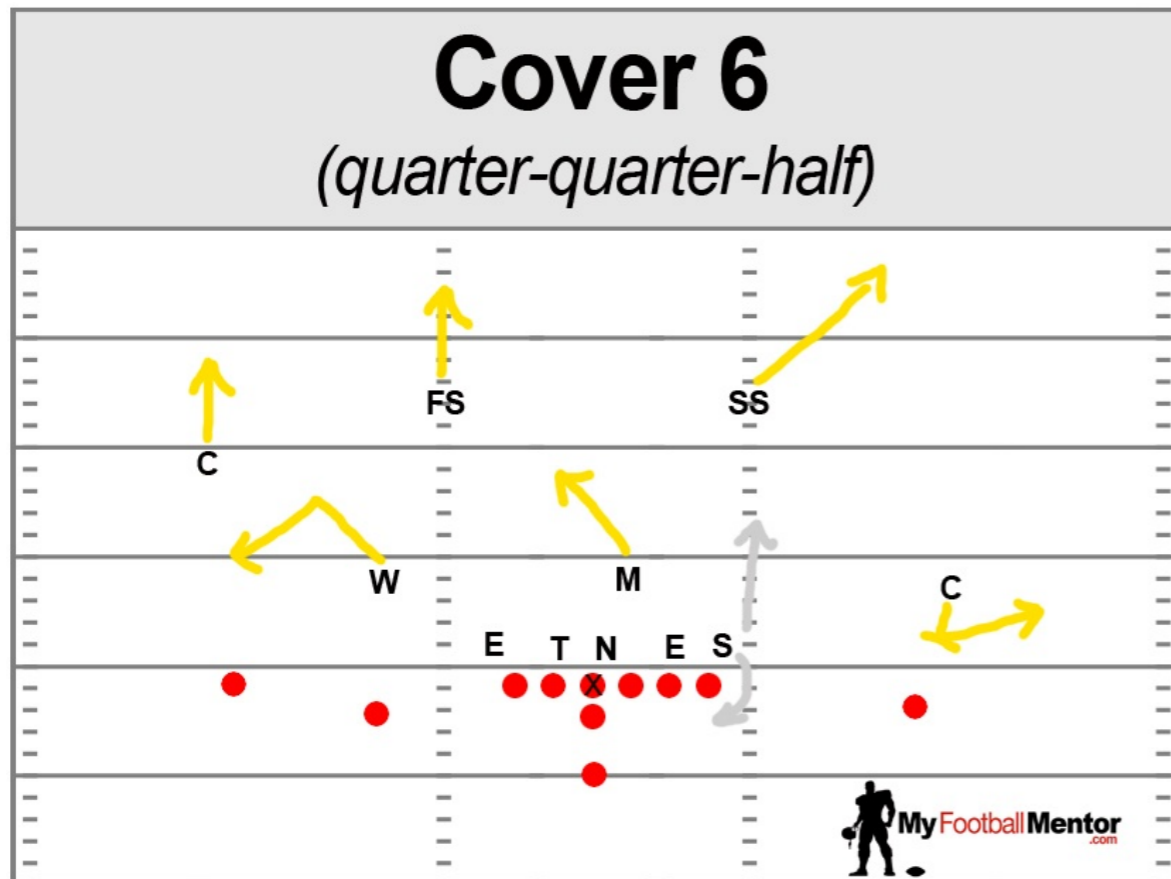
Cover 3 thirds coverage. The pre snap read is based on the alignment of SS and Corner on the strong side. Teams will typically define the TE as the strong side, however a scouting report will provide this information. If the SS is aligned with less depth than the Corner, the read is an invert by the SS; i.e., the SS is covering the flat, if a receiver is in the flat. Confirm 3 deep coverage by the alignment of the FS. If the FS is off the hash and favoring the middle, assume that it will be a 3 deep. Also the QB must be aware of the weak side, if the Weak side Linebacker “W” is in a stack (lined-up behind a defensive lineman or end) or walk (off the LOS outside the end) position, it denotes a soft corner,

with W responsible for the weak flat. If the end (“E”) is up on the LOS or in a three (3) point stance, assume he will rush. If you are throwing to the strong side upon the snap you can determine whether E is coming or has curl or flat.



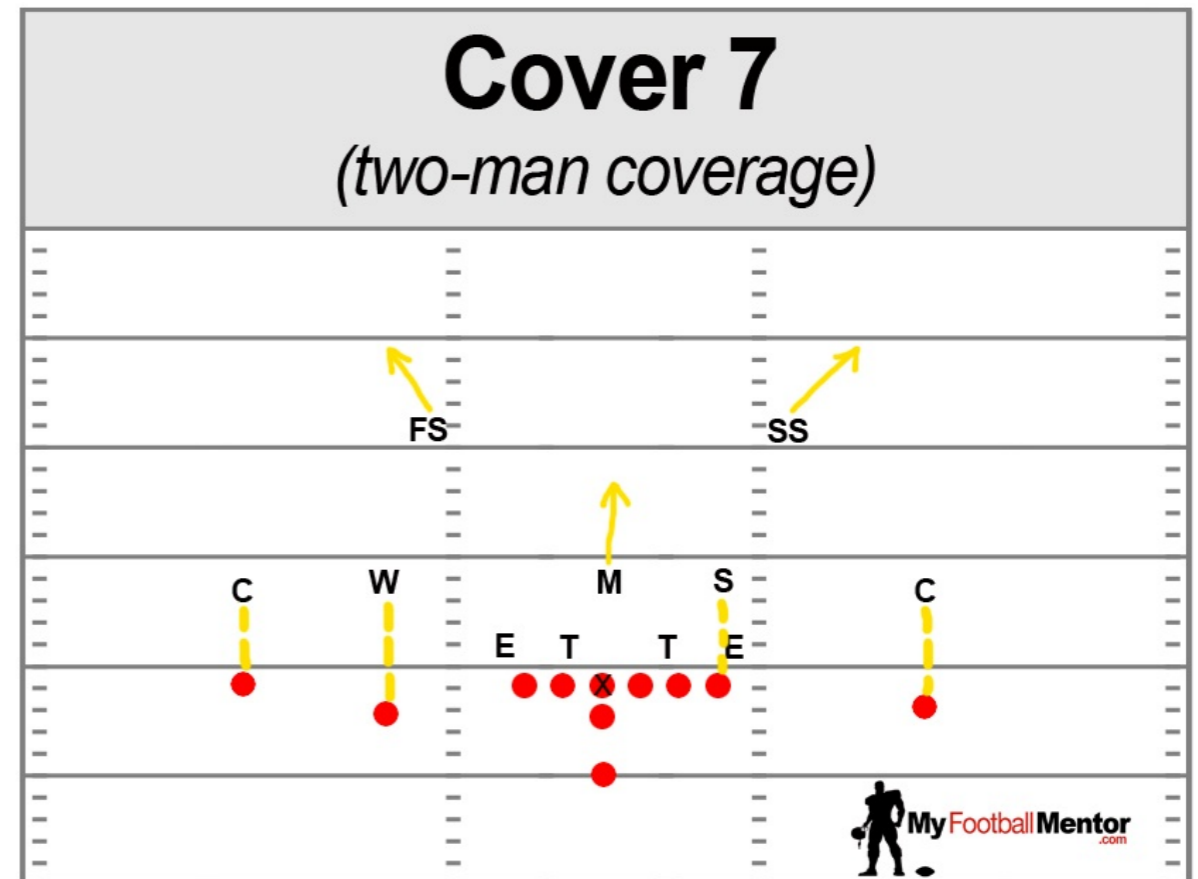
Cover 4 refers to four deep defenders, each guarding one-fourth of the deep zone. The pre snap read is the depth of the third level defenders. If both corners, the SS, and FS are aligned in the third level it indicates 1/4’s coverage. Cover 4 schemes are usually used to defend against deep passes. The most basic Cover 4 scheme involves two cornerbacks and two safeties. Upon snap, the cornerbacks work for depth, backpedaling into their assigned

zone. Both safeties backpedal towards their assigned zone. As with other coverage shells, Cover 4 is paired with underneath man or zone coverage in its most basic form.



Cover 6 refers to three deep defenders. The pre snap read is based on field alignment. Unlike 'Cover 3', the field is not split equally. Most teams that use Cover 6 are 3-4 Defenses, call offensive strength to the Field instead of to the offensive formation or front, and organize personnel by Field-side player and Boundary-side player. The position of the ball on the field therefore dictates strength of the offense. In Cover 6 the field safety and field corner cover fourths of the field, and depend on a

field outside linebacker to support underneath them. The free safety covers the boundary-side deep half and the boundary corner plays the flat. Thus the field side of the coverage is quarters, and the boundary side is cover 2.



Cover 7 zone half-coverage. The pre snap read is based on the alignment of the "W" backer. If he is head-up over 2 (slot receiver) and Corners are man-up. The Corners's will usually be man up on the wideouts. The Corners will have their eye's on the receiver if they are playing man and their eyes on the QB if they are playing zone. Cover-7 is often called "man-under halves" weak-side rotation coverage.

Confidence

The trait of self-confidence in the game of football is what translates into big plays on the football field for wide receivers and every other player on the field. Without it, you'll most likely lack the will, desire and mental ability to perform well. *In fact, without confidence there is no expectation for positive results. If you want to be your best and dominate your opponent, you have to EXPECT to.* So, how do wide receivers develop this expectancy and confidence?

Confidence comes from several sources and it varies from person to person.



Confidence

CHAPTER 10

1. How to Gain Confidence
2. Write it Down!
3. A Note to Coaches
4. Conclusion

How to Gain Confidence

So you might be asking, what exactly is self-confidence pertaining to football? Think of it as your everyday belief in your ability to perform well and win games. The trait of self-confidence in the game of football is what translates into big plays on the football field for wide receivers and every other player on the field. Without it, you'll most likely lack the will, desire and mental ability to perform well. ***In fact, without confidence there is no expectation for positive results. If you want to be your best and dominate your opponent, you have to EXPECT to!*** So, how do receivers develop this expectancy and confidence? Confidence comes from several sources and it varies from person to person, but here are some clues.

Football players get confidence from one or more of the following sources:

1. Past success and experience
2. Playing on a good football team
3. Performing well in the immediate past
4. Peers and coaches
5. Efficient practice
6. Your faith and/or understanding of your uniqueness

By the way, since we are on the topic of confidence, I want to address the sub title of this book, ‘How to dominate your opponent!’ Let me be clear, dominating your opponent is not talking smack and taking cheap shots. In fact some of the most dominant teams I’ve played with or coached are units that have a true respect for excellence and/or a big hearted performance from their opponents.

Dominating your opponent can include out-scoring and out-playing them, but it doesn’t mean belittling or disrespecting them. In fact, if you know you are dominant, there’s no need to even say it or push it. It’s done, the evidence was displayed on the field. PERIOD.

The most feared and respected players are those who are confident and comfortable with who they are. They are often the players who lend a hand up to their opponent on the ground. After all, they have nothing to prove and a hand up just confirms their dominance (and their class).



Okay, back to developing confidence. Here are a few tips that can help you feel confident throughout any game you’re in:

Believe in your talents and skills as a top receiver. This is the core definition of confidence. If you truly believe in your skills as a wide receiver as well as your physical talents (which you should feel great about if you’ve read and implemented the techniques we offer in this book), then you will have confidence. If you believe in yourself more than anyone on the field, then you have confidence. This comes from the trust in your skills as a wide receiver, such as running effective routes, proper technique when catching the football, being able to burst and/or stop, high pointing the ball, being a great blocker, etc.

Next in this chapter we discuss the importance of replaying and reminding yourself of your strengths by writing them down on paper. Another important thing to do is **NEVER verbally assault your potential but rather repeat the positive results you want.** One of my players once said, “I suck at slant routes, I always seem to drop those.” Guess what, he’ll continue to stink at slants because his words will reinforce his negative belief. Again, you have to ‘expect it’ to ‘get it’.

Here’s a link to a popular youtube video that demonstrates the power of repeating a positive phrase that builds your expectancy to be a champion. [link to video](#)



As a wide receiver, the best way to keep your football confidence strong is to constantly remind yourself why you will succeed.

Most football players fail to give themselves enough credit for the successes and other skills they possess that contribute to the team. Each player, whether they are on the first team offense or scout team defense have an important role on the team.

Write it Down!

Players often overlook their own personal successes on the field while others simply disqualify positives in their career as if they're insignificant. ***I'd recommend that you compose a list of reasons why you deserve to succeed and read it before every practice and game.*** So, what's on your list for the reasons to succeed? It can be comprised of your ability, your team, your strong work ethic, past success, good coaches, practice, fitness, and many other areas that contribute to confidence. Write down at least 6 things and hopefully it will build into 12, 24, or even more! This makes for a great foundation for football confidence.

Make reading your 'confidence list' part of your pre-game routine. Another mental technique is running your plays in your head over and over. Visualize every detail from rolling off the front foot of a proper stance (without a stutter step!), to breaking down in 3 steps, then getting your elbow and head around and finally catching the ball out in front of your body with your fingers. See it in your mind and feel the rush of pride that comes with excellent performance.

You may physically dominate on the practice field and/or weight room but how is your mental strength and confidence?



Battle the doubt

Part of staying confident is battling your own internal doubt. No one is perfect and in times of adversity it's tough not to have any doubts about winning. But, to be successful and push through these rough stages of mental thought, you must remain optimistic and fight any negative thoughts until they're silenced. The first

place to start is to identify any doubts you have had in the past, one's that are themes in your athletic career such as "My team is not good enough to win." The next step is to counter the doubt with statements that turn the situation around into an advantage such as: "I have the confidence that my team is better than any team we play and with my the help of my talents, we have what it takes to be great."

You have to see it before you can achieve it. This is called the law of attraction. It's so simple for children to have big dreams about the future, but as adults that same ability gets beaten down by others. Keeping dreams alive means seeing and feeling success close in hand and not letting anyone take that vision away from you. To win at football, playing the wide receiver position, you have to see yourself win over and over again. With that vision comes confidence that it is all possible.

Use the past to feel confident today. Most football players would say that past success and experience in playing is the number one source for confidence today. You can tap into your success in the past to help you feel confident today by replaying successful games, practices, conversations, in your mind. In today's game you might recall a successful play you had on a similar field or in similar conditions.

Patience is a form of football confidence. A patient wide receiver is a confident wide receiver. The challenge in football is to stay patient when things are not going your way. It's easy to give in to

internal doubt and criticism when you are not on top in your game. But the better choice is to stay patient with results and wait for good things to happen. A patient football player says to himself that “it might not be happening right now but I know my play will take a turn for the better without doubt!” Stay focused on the task at hand and don’t let a few mishaps deter you from playing at the high level you know you’re capable of. Read this chapter often so you go into every game with the proper mindset and with a high level of football confidence.



A Note To Coaches

An effective coach doesn't motivate his players, he gets his players to motivate themselves. Inspirational ‘rah-rah’ speeches can motivate the team for a brief moment but what a team needs is players who are internally motivated. To get there takes time and a variety of techniques based on the temperament of each player.

Coaching a successful team boils down to leadership. ***A big part of leadership is to ‘know your players.’*** And while every player on the team wears the same colors and logo, the same can’t be said with regard to their learning modality and personality style.

While each player is different, praise can be your biggest tool in developing self motivation within your team. Praise should be public and heard often, especially for new and weaker players. Some players need confidence to stick it out or even complete in a drill, initially. Early on, find the most insignificant things to praise your players about. Every player is different. ***Each personality inside of that helmet processes coaching differently but the sure fire way to succeed with everyone is to start off with praise.***

Praise needs to be immediate, specific and loud enough so the player and his PEERS hear it. Abundant praise should be loud but most importantly earned. The more praise that is earned, the more your players will fight to hear it.

A great way to establish a positive environment is to catch your players doing something right and use a key phrase to let everyone know your approval. University of Nebraska Head Coach Bo Pelini and his staff use the phrase, “I see you.” For example, “I see you ‘_____.’ (players name)” If they see a player doing something right they yell it out loudly; “I see you Trent Jones, nice footwork.” “I see you Darien Matthews, great hustle.”

Praising positive practice and outcomes can be easy as compared to negative outcomes and tough situations. Here are a few ideas on how to correct errors in a positive way:



Don't state the obvious.

Yelling at a player to “CATCH THE BALL!”, who just dropped a pass, doesn't serve anybody. A better approach would be pulling

that player aside and asking him, “do you understand why you dropped the ball?” Then proceed to listen to his response and make your coaching point. If his hands were positioned wrong, show him again at that moment the correct hand positioning. If he took his eyes off the ball, demonstrate again how to look the ball into his grasp, tuck and run.

Positive programming wins.

One coaching staff reinforces the phrase, “Practice bad, play bad.” Another team's coaching staff uses, “Practice great, play great.” What mental images do you want flying around your player's heads the night before a game? Play great, or play bad?

Positive memories only.

The human brain is unlimited and the brain controls the player which performs on the field. It's always best to remind the brain (the player) of the positive performance they have had. For example, if your slot receiver isn't reading the defense correctly on a Friday night say something along the lines of “Tyler, remember to read the strong safety just like you did so well in practice this week.”



Conclusion

If you've made it this far in the book then you are on your way to being a better receiver or receiver coach! As a former receiver and receiver coach for over twenty years, this book is meant to be a first hand account of how to get it done on the field, how to dominate your opponent!

If you apply or learn to teach the techniques and methods that I've taught in this book and you really work at them, I guarantee you increased success on the field. Remember one thing though, you are only as good on the field as you are off of it! How you conduct yourself as a person and how hard you work in the off-

season translates to more success than any technique or method I can teach!

I once heard a group of people telling Jerry Rice that he was the greatest to ever play the game. His response was classic and the reason why he is the greatest to ever play the position of receiver: "No I wasn't, I just worked the hardest!"

Note to self, "Being the best is a choice because I can determine how hard I work." And with that thought I wish you not with luck but for all the success you are willing to work for! Be the best, I believe in you!

Coach Van Tassel



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Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Boundary Side

Short side of field relative to a formation. Closest to the sideline.

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Break Point

The point where the route changes direction

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Cover 0

Cover 0 is a straight man-to-man with no safety help. The PSR is based on the alignment of the safeties. Usually in man coverage, the SS will play head up on the TE and the FS will play shallow on the weak side. Typically, there is no safety in the middle of the field. We can confirm this coverage by the inside leverage alignment by the Corners on the wide receivers. The C's need this alignment as they have no inside help. The QB should anticipate pressure from a blitz. The QB must identify whether a blitz is coming and throw the ball to the defenders vacated spot or a crossing receiver; i.e., "hot read". The QB could audible to add pass protection.

Related Glossary Terms

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Cover 1

Cover 1 is man-to-man with a FS to help over the top. The pre snap read is based on the alignment of the Corners and linebackers on the receivers. The Corners will be head up or in an outside alignment because they have help from the FS. This allows the Corners to take away the outs. Also, if the SS aligns head up on his eligible receiver at a tight to normal depth (4-6 yards) and the FS is deeper than normal (12-15 yards), this will confirm the Man-Free coverage. The linebackers will have the backs man-to-man. The QB should anticipate pressure from a five man rush, with the possibility of the defense bringing seven.

Related Glossary Terms

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Cover 2

The Corners's will usually be outside of the wide receivers and the two safeties will be near the hash marks, aligned deeper than the corners. If the ball is on the hash, look to the strong side defensive back for their alignment because the safety will naturally be on the hash. If the end ("E") drops to the curl, then all six underneath zones are covered. When "W" has outside leverage on the second receiver, assume "W" has flat and rule out two deep, five under coverage and is possibly 3D rotation or Quarter-Quarter, Half.

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Cover 3

Cover 3 is often referred to as thirds coverage. The pre snap read is based on the alignment of SS and Corner on the strong side. Teams will typically define the TE as the strong side, however a scouting report will provide this information. If the SS is aligned with less depth than the Corner, the read is an invert by the SS; i.e., the SS is covering the flat, if a receiver is in the flat. Confirm 3 deep coverage by the alignment of the FS. If the FS is off the hash and favoring the middle, assume that it will be a 3 deep. Also the QB must be aware of the weak side, if the Weak side Linebacker “W” is in a stack (lined-up behind a defensive lineman or end) or walk (off the LOS outside the end) position, it denotes a soft corner, with W responsible for the weak flat. If the end (“E”) is up on the LOS or in a three (3) point stance, assume he will rush. If you are throwing to the strong side upon the snap you can determine whether E is coming or has curl or flat.

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Cushion

The Space between the receiver and defender

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

End Zone

The 'end zone' is the 'goal' in American football. End Zones are located on far ends of the field and are 10 yards deep.

Related Glossary Terms

Goal Posts

Index

Find Term

Field Side

Wide side of field relative to a formation. Furthest from the sideline.

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Five Points of Pressure

Points of pressure of the (1) The hand around the ball, i.e. “the claw”, (2) The forearm pressed firmly against exterior of the ball, (3) The bicep over the inside tip of the ball, (4) Carry ball across the chest, (5) The pointer finger over the tip of the football. [See video explanation.](#)

Related Glossary Terms

High and Tight

Index

Find Term

Football Field

All football fields share the same overall outside dimensions. The outside measurements include the End Zone. High School, College and the NFL all have overall outside dimensions of:

Length: 360 feet or 120 yards

Width: 160 feet or 53 $\frac{1}{3}$ yards

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Goal Posts

NFL goal posts are 10 feet high and 18 feet, 6 inches wide (same as NCAA)

High School: Goal posts by contrast are 10 feet high and 23 feet, 4 inches wide.

Related Glossary Terms

End Zone

Index

Find Term

Hash Marks

High School: the width of the hashmarks are 53 feet, 4 inches

College: hashmarks are 40 feet wide

NFL Hash marks are the narrowest of all the levels of football play. They measure 70 feet, 9 inches from the sidelines and are 18 feet, 6 inches wide. (same as the width of the goal posts)

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Find Term

High and Tight

Correct technique to carry a football. see “5 points of pressure”



Related Glossary Terms

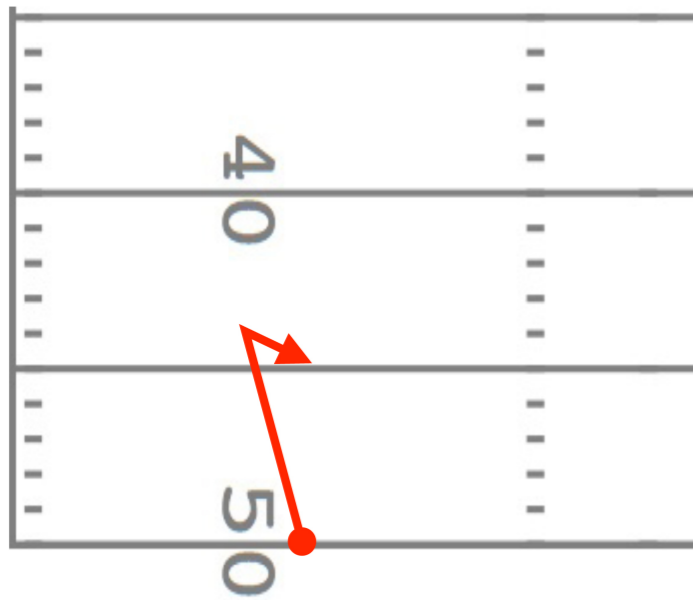
Five Points of Pressure

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Find Term

Hitch Route

The hitch route is a quick route that is a vertical push and stop up to about six yards. The quarterback takes a three step drop when throwing this route. I teach my receivers to attack the defender's outside shoulder as he pushes up field.



Hitch at 6 yards

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Horizontal

Horizontal- Attacking the width of the football field

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Line Releases

When a defender plays press coverage (up tight, right in front of the receiver) a receiver needs to quickly get “off the jam.” The objective is to have as little contact with the defender as possible. We want to be able to move the defender to a side and run where he use to be. We don’t ever want to run around a defender as this will disrupt our pass route alignment down field.

Related Glossary Terms

Press Coverage

Index

Find Term

Monk Drill

As the receiver is waiting for the ball to arrive, his hands are in prayer position in front of his chest. As the ball approaches he keeps his hands together to the ball, and at the last moment opens his hands and catches the ball.

Related Glossary Terms

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Index

Find Term

Press Coverage

When the defender is right at the line of scrimmage up facing the receiver

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Re-route

A technique by the defender to force a receiver off his line on a pass route.

Related Glossary Terms

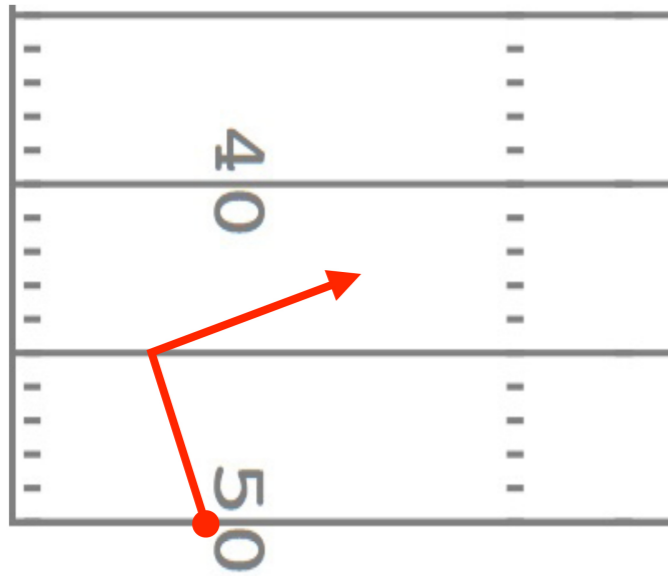
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Find Term

Slant Route

The very first characteristic of the slant route that I teach my players is to make sure and run this route at a 45 angle out of the break. Usually, the pass is used when the corner or nickelback are playing further away from the receiver, so a quick pass is able to be completed before the defender has time to try to break up the pass. The pass is used frequently in the West Coast system, where quick, accurate throwing is key.



Slant vs Zone

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

Find Term

Slip and Slide

Slipping the inside or outside hip of a defender and then sliding back on top of the defender (stacking).

Related Glossary Terms

Stacking

Index

Find Term

Snatch Drill

When running a pass route you want to snatch the ball out of the air at the last second! A big mistake I see players make is they run the last five steps of their route with arms out. This is very common on vertical routes up the field. Think of that lizard with the long quick tongue as it “snatches” the insect from the air.

Related Glossary Terms

Monk Drill

Index

Find Term

Soft Coverage

Soft Coverage- Defender 6 to 10 yards off the line of scrimmage

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Stacking

Putting a defender in a trail position behind the receiver

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Stemming

Attacking the defender with run/route angles off the line of scrimmage.

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Stop Routes

Routes such as the hitch, curl, and comeback where there is a vertical push to dead stop.

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Top 10 Receiver Musts

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Find Term

Chapter 7 - Route Running

Two Way Go

A position where the receiver can attack either the left or right side of a defender.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Vertical

Vertical- Attacking the length of the football field

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