

Being a stout defense against the run is not just about aggressiveness, it's about understanding roles and responsibilities, reading properly and then attacking with a purpose.

Most missed run fits happen because a defender is unsure of their job or trying to make something happen instead of doing their job and trusting others to do theirs.

In this chapter we'll define who owns each gap, who supports it, and who cleans it up—so players can play fast without guessing.

Our Run Fit Philosophy

Our 4-2-5 run defense is built on a few key principles:

1. Every gap is accounted for
2. We spill the ball to our speed
3. The front six must understand and react to their reads

I'd rather give up a 3-yard gain than an explosive play caused by over-aggression or lack of discipline.

Box Count and Structure

Against most formations, the defense fits the run with six or seven defenders:

- 4 Defensive Linemen
- 2 Linebackers
- Possibly 1 overhang based on formation, see Figure 5.3 as an example

Safeties and overhangs are usually alley and force players, not primary gap defenders—unless dictated by formation or call.

Gap Terminology

To eliminate confusion, we use consistent gap language:

Gap Name	Location of Gap
A	Between C and G's on either side of C
B	Between G and T on either side of line
C	Outside the T or between T and TE if one is present

Some people will add a "D" gap outside the TE or call that the "ALLEY", whatever your terminology, it's completely up to you, just be consistent with it and make sure your players are on the same page with you.

Defensive Line Run Fits

Defensive Ends

- Primary responsibility: C or D gap based on alignment. (usually C gap)
- Technique: set the edge, squeeze down on down-blocks and look for pullers
- Goal: force the ball inside to help

Defensive Tackles

- Primary responsibility: A or B gap depending on alignment
- Technique: Own gap, don't try and make plays all over field
- Goal: close space, fight pressure

Linebacker Run Fits

Your linebacker run fits will either be the same or different based on whether you swap

your backers from strong to weak. Some teams are blessed with backers that can play either position – or in the case of small schools you might have to determine who is strong/weak.

Mike & Will

- Play side backer scrapes over the top of DL and forces runner to their help (weak side backer)
 - **When play is inside the umbrella** (Inside zone, trap, ISO, etc) - play side linebacker plays with outside leverage to force runner to his help – the backside linebacker.
 - **When outside the umbrella** (Jet sweep, toss sweep, outside zone, etc)- the play side linebacker plays with inside leverage as the overhangs will force the runner back inside to their help - which would be the linebacker running outside in support.
- Gap exchange with DE on pull reads

Linebackers never guess. They read their triangle and react. This is a skill that cannot be practiced enough – the less your linebackers have to think and can just react, the faster they will play and the better your run defense will be.

When talking about inside and outside leverage and your two inside linebackers, the best way to think about it is you want your linebackers to keep the ball carrier between them.

Overhang Run Fits

Your overhangs will be your force players in most cases depending on your scheme.

Responsibilities:

- Be the force or spill player depending on scheme, usually the force
- Handle jet, bubble, perimeter runs, etc. as the force player

If your overhang loses outside contain and tries to make plays “inside” his leverage point, your defense will get into trouble very quickly – especially if you are allowing your CB’s to be late to run support. You need to teach this leverage point with your overhangs daily.

Deep Safety Run Fits

I call them deep safeties depending on how you play – a single high look with two overhangs, or a double high look with two deep safeties and a single overhang.

Deep safeties are:

- Alley players
- Cutback defenders
- Explosive-play preventers

They fit late, fast, and downhill—never flat-footed. Teach your deep safeties to read the blocks and flow as they are coming downhill and fill from the inside out on outside runs. (Remember, your overhangs have outside force)

Coaching the Fits

Best teaching progression:

1. Walkthrough with cones to first teach, then do drills during game week to reiterate
2. Half-speed fits
3. Full-speed inside run
4. Team period

Never install run fits during team session without walking through them first or doing an INSIDE RUN session in indy period.

Common Run Fit Mistakes

- Two defenders in one gap (**NEVER** want this to happen – this means we've lost gap integrity and a big play is usually the result. Be very careful of this when blitzing.)
- Nobody in the cutback lane
- Overhang fitting too wide
- Safeties triggering too early

If the fit is wrong, slow it down and go through it, don't speed it up.

Final Thoughts on Run Fits

Run defense is about trust. Linebackers need to trust the DL, DL needs to trust the LBs, etc.

When players trust:

- The structure
- Their teammates
- Their rules

They play downhill without hesitation and therefore play fast – and that is a dangerous team.

Sound run fits turn the 4-2-5 into a physical, disciplined defense—not a finesse one.