

Your front structure determines how well the defense handles the run and how cleanly it transitions into coverage. At the High School level, the goal is not to win every snap with movement or disguise, but to stay structurally sound and force the offense to execute consistently.

As I mentioned earlier, my main philosophy and based on what we usually see in our division, is that our defense first and foremost must stop the run. We will force teams to have to pass in order to beat us, so the front 6-8 is crucial to our success and something we practice on just with the front daily in practice vs the run to ensure our run fits are solid and understood as well. We have an INSIDE RUN session almost daily once we get in season - it is that important to us.

The 4-2-5 front is designed to be multiple in appearance yet simple in its rules.

Base Front Philosophy

We believe in:

- Consistent spacing
- Gap integrity

The front should look the same to the offense week after week, even as responsibilities remain sound against multiple formations. Our belief is that you will usually know where we will be and how we will line up - but our training and technique will win the day more times than not.

The Base Even Front - Umbrella Concept

Our base front is an even, four-down structure.

Defensive Line Techniques

- **Field End:** 5-technique (outside shoulder of the tackle)
- **Boundary End:** 5-technique or wide 5
- **Field/Strong Tackle:** 3-technique
- **Boundary/Weak Tackle:** 2i or shade

This alignment:

- Usually keeps our linebackers clean
- Creates natural spill leverage
- Allows overhangs to fit aggressively and play force

One of the strengths of the 4-2-5 is the fact that you can separate your coverage and front six from each other. So, regardless of what your front six looks like, your coverage is completely separate and has no bearing on the front. An analogy that I've heard in the past is an umbrella concept or a wine glass as shown in figure 5.1

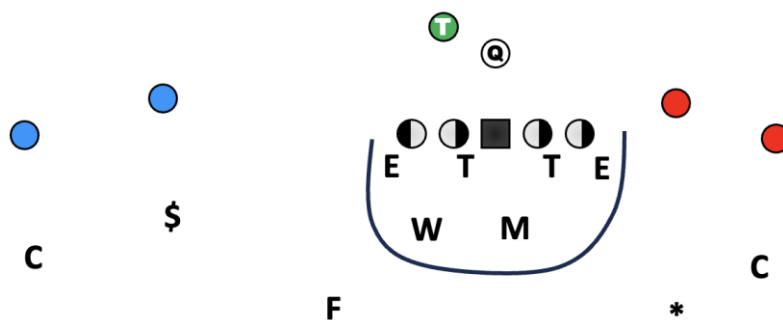


Figure 5.1 – Umbrella Concept

(The front six is separated from the coverage. Regardless of what coverage we play in the 4-2-5, our front six are still gap sound and can play the run or pass soundly.)

Staying in the Even Front

Even fronts:

- Simplify run fits
- Prevent vertical seams
- Reduce pre-snap confusion

By staying even as much as we can, we force offenses to win with execution rather than numbers as we stay gap sound without having to have anyone 2-gap up front. We do what we do, we know how to do it well, and we will bet on the fact that our execution will “out-execute” the offenses.

Front Adjustments vs TE Sets

Tight end sets create surface and gap challenges. The solution is scouting and technique, not wholesale change. What I mean by scouting is understanding what the offense is trying to do with the TE. If the TE is not much of a passing threat and mainly in there to run block, we'd probably bring an extra man (Overhang) down on the line of scrimmage. If they are more of a passing threat, we'd stay in a four front and keep our Overhang back to be able to play run and pass.

Rules vs Attached TE

- End widens to a 6 or heavy 5
- Tackle stays inside
- Linebackers adjust depth, not alignment

The goal is to set the edge and force the ball to help.

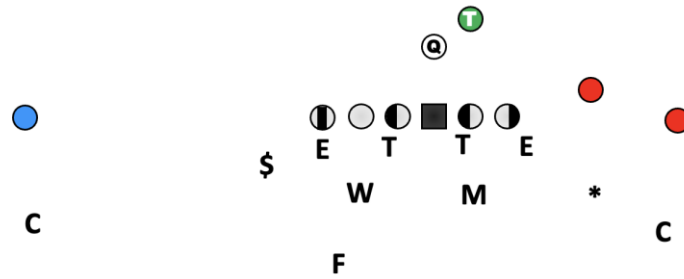


Figure 5.2 - Front Adjustment vs TE / Y-Off Set

(Based on scouting and understanding what the offense likes to do with a TE, we can stay in a four front and put the DE head up on the TE, or we could keep the DE in a 5 tech and bring our overhang (the \$ in this diagram) down onto the line of scrimmage and in a 9 tech. Either way, we stay gap sound.)

Handling Unbalanced Formations

Unbalanced sets cause panic when defenses over-adjust. As mentioned several times before, how we react to these formations also depends on scouting and what the offense usually does out of them. For teams that run a Wing-T, Double Tites, etc. and actually base their offense around those – we will adjust and make sure we have the numbers to match up – but for those who are spread teams and then line up in a Wing-T and just run their normal plays out of – we are usually less inclined to chase numbers up front.

But for the sake of this section, lets assume that the unbalanced sets we are seeing are because the teams run the offenses around them.

Base Rule

- We align to surface
- We keep the box intact as much as possible
- Need to make sure we aren't outnumbered on either side

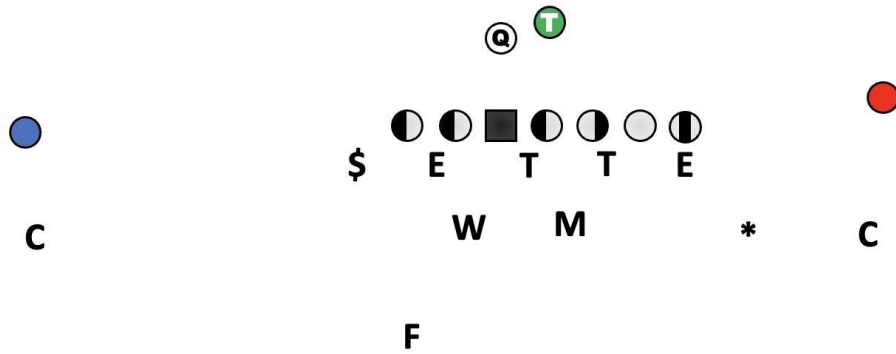


Figure 5.3 - Even Front vs Unbalanced Formation

(What are they trying to accomplish out of their unbalanced fronts? Above the offense is unbalanced to our right. All we do is make a new Center to align our front around and we remain gap sound. Above the LG is now treated as the C and we call out SHIFT RIGHT to our DL and the entire line shifts around the LG as our new C. We bring the \$ or overhang down on the LOS on the left side we stay gap sound and don't give up the edge)

Teaching Front Structure

Front structure must be taught in layers. It starts from the first day of practice in the spring before the pads even come on and is worked on daily. By the time you reach your first game, there is no question from anyone about where they line up, what the calls are, their roles and responsibilities, etc.

Best practices:

- Walk through every formation as often as possible, daily in the spring.
- Teach fits without a football
- Emphasize landmarks and reads

Players should know their alignment and assignment before hearing the call if you've practiced it enough during the week.

Common Front Errors

- DL over-penetrating
- DL losing gap control
- Linebackers eyes in the wrong place and not following their reads
- Overhangs losing outside contain and peaking/jumping inside

Final Thought on Fronts

The front is not designed to be clever—it is designed to be reliable. There is not much offensive coordinators at any level have not seen before, so instead of trying to be cute, work on being solid.

When players:

- Trust the structure
- Know their landmarks
- Play fast off simple rules

The defense becomes difficult to attack.