

Defense starts before the ball is snapped. As we've discussed, players need to understand the situation, their alignment, the call that was made and most importantly their responsibility – before the ball is even snapped.

Most explosive plays are not caused by poor effort or missed tackles—they are caused by bad alignment pre-snap. The purpose of this chapter is to eliminate confusion by establishing a consistent, repeatable base structure that players can line up in against any formation.

If the defense lines up correctly, everything else becomes easier.

### **The Importance of a Base Structure**

A base structure answers three questions for every defender:

1. What is the situation and what is the defensive call?
2. Where do I line up?
3. What is my assignment?

The 4-2-5 works because it answers those questions the same way every snap, regardless of formation.

### **Field vs Boundary Philosophy**

Majority of High School football games are usually played on one hash or the other. You can organize your defense however you see fit – many call the defense based around offensive strength or passing strength while others line up based on which side of the field is the field or the boundary.

For the sake of this chapter, we'll discuss how we would align to the field vs boundary since this ebook is designed for High School coaches. Figure 4.1 shows a typical

balanced offensive formation lined up near the boundary and how we'd align our 4-2-5 against this formation.

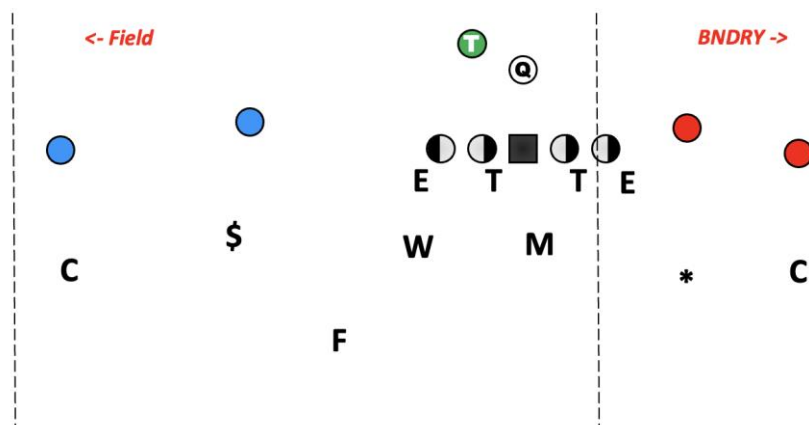
### Definitions

- **Field:** Wide side of the field
- **Boundary:** Short side of the field

This allows:

- Consistent spacing
- Predictable leverage
- Fewer formation checks

As we are defining personnel from the previous chapter, one of the things that usually becomes evident is that there are certain players that have more speed and athleticism than others and it makes sense to usually make them field defenders. Based on the team you are playing and have scouted, you should ensure your players know whether they are a field defender or a boundary defender before the offense breaks the huddle.



**Figure 4.1 - Base 4-2-5 Structure** – offense in a balanced set with field/boundary labeled and defensive alignment shaded accordingly.



## Linebacker Alignment

Linebackers align off the ball with depth at roughly 4-5 yds from the line of scrimmage, this depth allows them to:

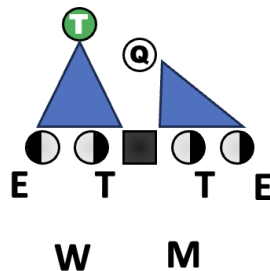
- Read their triangle
- Fit downhill
- Play laterally when needed
- Linebackers at the HS level should usually be reading guards for pulls but this is based more off scouting and what teams tendencies are.

## Base Alignment Rules

- The easiest way to remember the LB's alignment and gap responsibilities is "Strong A, Weak B"

In the alignment below, the strength is usually set to the 3 Tech, which means the LB on the Strong side of the formation has the A gap (the MIKE backer in figure 4.3) and the LB to the weak side has the B gap (the WILL backer in figure 4.3)

- Depth: 4 to 5 yards off the ball



**Figure 4.3 - Linebacker Alignment and Read Triangle**

*(LB depth at approx 4-5 yds and their read triangles.)*

## Overhang Alignment

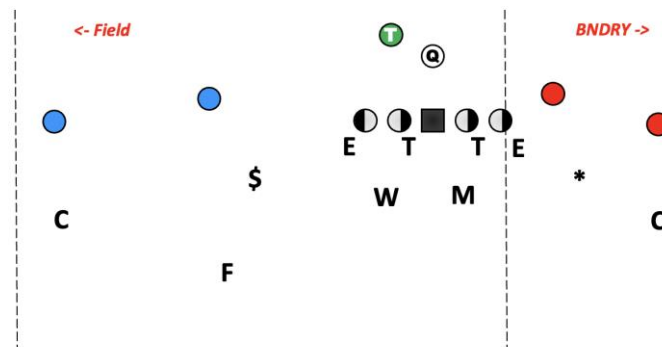
The overhangs in a single high structure would align as apex defenders. They split the distance between the end man on the line of scrimmage (EMOL) and the nearest receiver. There are exceptions to this, like if the offense gives a tight split, then the overhang would line up outside of the nearest receiver since they are responsible for force on outside runs.

### Base Rule

- Split the difference between:
  - #2 receiver
  - The end man on the line of scrimmage

This alignment allows the overhangs to:

- Fit the run quickly
- Expand to cover space
- Adjust without motion checks



**Figure 4.4 - Overhang Alignments vs #2 Receiver**

(Overhang defenders in apex position to the field and the overhang defender with outside leverage to the boundary – both with run/pass responsibility zones.)

## Safety Alignment

With a two-high safety look, the Free Safety usually lines up to the wide side of the field and the overhang on the opposite side (in diagram 4.5 the star defender) lines up deep on the short side, or boundary.

## Base Alignment

- 10–12 yards deep
- Inside leverage on #2
- Square stance with vision on the QB

Safeties must be able to:

- Close downhill
- Expand vertically
- Communicate coverage

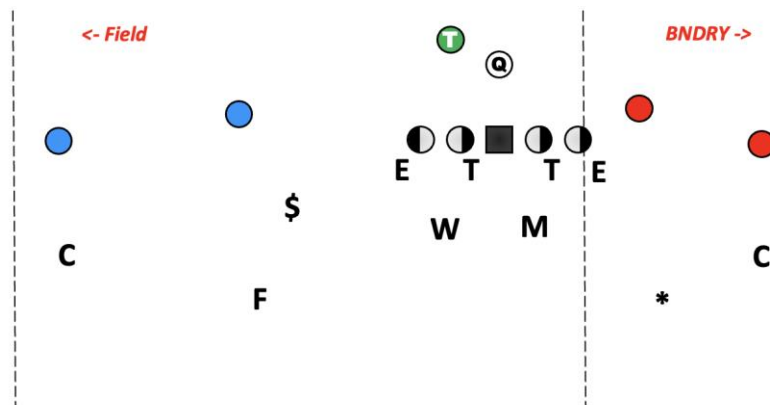


Figure 4.5 - Two-High Safety Alignment – Base Look

## Corner Alignment

Corners align with leverage and discipline. We'll use the same figure in 4.6 that we

used earlier to show where the CB's will align in our base alignment. (These alignments can change based on coverage and responsibilities)

### Base Rules

- Outside leverage unless WR is close to sideline
- 5–7 yards depth (off coverage)
- Eyes on #1 receiver

The goal is to:

- Funnel routes inside
- Protect against verticals
- Force throws into help

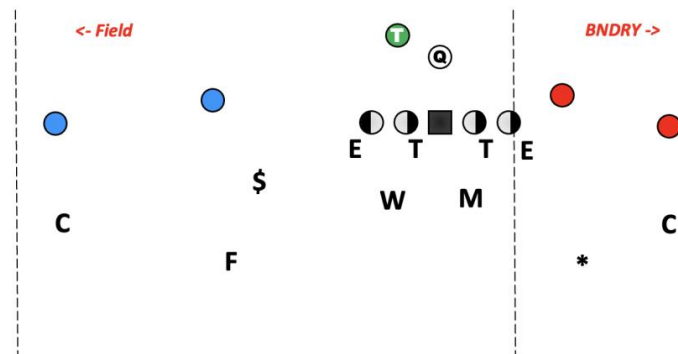


Figure 4.6 - Corner Alignment and Leverage

### Alignment vs Common Formations

Rather than changing our defense, we can just adjust spacing and alignment of some of our players so that we remain gap sound against the run and able to get to our coverage responsibilities.



- Overhang tightens alignment
- Box integrity stays intact

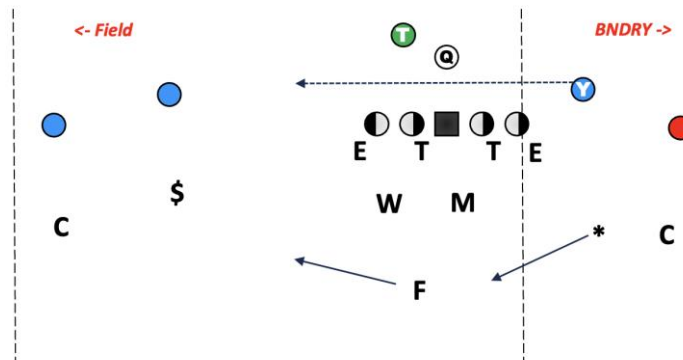
### Motion Rules

One of the important things to make sure you teach early when you install this defense is how to handle motion from the offense. Motion should never cause panic in a 4-2-5 defense. Consider the cross-training we do that was mentioned earlier, this allows overhangs to drop as safeties as well as CB's.

### Base Motion Rule

- If motion stays shallow → bump
- If motion goes vertical or behind the QB (Orbit motion) → communicate and pass

We do not chase motion. We pass it off.



**Figure 4.8 - Motion Adjustment – Bump Technique**

(As the Y receiver motions across the formation, we bump our secondary to match it. In the above figure, the FS slides out with the motion and the star overhang bumps to the middle. At the end of the motion, we will look like we do in Figure 4.7 vs 3x1 formation)

## **Teaching Alignments & Motions**

Alignment and motions must be coached daily.

Best practices:

- Demand perfect alignment in walkthroughs
- Stop drills for alignment errors
- Praise alignment as much as effort

Players must believe that alignment matters and that they must get to the proper alignment even after motion.

## **Common Alignment Errors**

- Overhangs drifting too wide
- Safeties too deep or too flat
- DL not lining up properly
- Corners losing leverage

Fix alignment before fixing technique.

## **Final Thoughts on Structure**

The base structure is the anchor of the entire defense.

If players:

- Line up correctly (Alignment)
- Understand their spacing (Assignment)
- Trust the structure (Do your job)

Then the defense plays fast without thinking. (Effort)

Everything that follows—run fits, coverage, pressure—depends on this base foundation. Make sure you get it right before moving on to anything else.