



NYSOCA

Volunteer Coach Training Program



Coaching Youth Football



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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

MATT YUNKER: Hi Coaches, my name is Matt Yunker and I am the manager of youth football for the Cleveland Browns and we've got some of our very best youth football coaches that are going to show you some instruction on how to make your team and program better and we've got some great athletes from the Lou Groza youth football league to demonstrate the drills. We wish you the best of luck in this upcoming football season and hope you take something valuable away from this video.



CHAPTER 2 - WARM-UP

COACH: We start every practice with a warm-up. What we're trying to do is get the muscles loose and blood flowing through the body; that way they're not injuring themselves. The first part of the warm-up we'll do is a dynamic warm-up, which means the players are moving while they are stretching and the second part of the warm-up will be a static stretch which means they are staying still while they stretch, which is a little bit different type of stretch.

The first stretch is pulling their knees up to their chest for about five yards, and then going with high knees with good arm action for the next five, and then finishing around the cones. We don't want players to be in a hurry. Again, this stretches out the hamstrings and the quads. Next, players pull their heels up to their butts for a quad stretch and then jog it out doing butt kicks. You want players to try and get their heels up to their butt and again this is a dynamic stretch as they are moving while they are stretching. You don't want players racing but instead trying to get a lot of reps in. This stretches the front of the leg.



Next, players will do a side lunge to stretch their groin area. They lean to the left and then lean to the right and then take a big crossover step and repeat. This is a moving stretch and you want players to be outside their shoulders with their step to really loosen up their groin muscles. Then we have players do a nice easy jog at about 50 percent, again trying to build to our game time speed or our practice speed. We don't want anything too fast or all out just yet, we want to work up to that.

Next we do a medium jog at about 75 percent. Now we do game speed for 10 yards at 100 percent.

Now we'll move to the static portion of our stretch. We begin by having players hold their right leg up with their heel to their butt and then switch to the left leg, using the opposite hand to hold out for balance. Now with the feet together and the hands up they go straight down without bending the legs and touch their toes. If they can put their hands flat on the ground then do so. Players don't bend their knees. Players then spread their feet out slightly and lean out to the right

to stretch out the groin; point the toes of the left foot up in the air and then go back to center and then lean to the left and point the toes of the right foot in the air and then go back to the center. Players then spread their feet a little wider and reach their hands back through their legs; and then do some jumping jacks.

You just want to make sure you have a warm-up to start practice, maybe it's 10 minutes to get the blood flowing, it helps prevent injuries and helps get the kids warmed up and ready for practice.

CHAPTER 3 - OFFENSIVE HUDDLE AND HOLE NUMBERING SYSTEM

COACH: Organization is extremely important in the game of football and it all starts in the huddle. The type of huddle that we are going to show you today is a simple two-tier huddle. The huddle needs to be set 5 to 7 yards from the line of scrimmage. The center establishes the huddle by jogging out to that 5- to 7-yard mark. His job is to hold his hands up and call "huddle." What we typically do is line up the offensive line in the front row and line up all of the perimeter players in the second row. This is a two-tier huddle because we want the first row with their hands on their knees but their heads should still be up so they can see and breathe properly. The back row is standing tall. It is very important that the back row is standing directly behind a player in front of them. What that does is create a very easy count system for our quarterback – the quarterback can very easily see five in the front row and five in the back row so he knows he has the proper number in the huddle. We leave all the communication to the quarterback in the huddle. He is the only one that is allowed to talk in that huddle. We have the quarterback give the play call and cadence twice – once to the right side of the huddle and once to the left side of the huddle and then they will all break out. It is important that all 11 players hustle to the line of scrimmage and get set in their proper positions. We have to make sure there are seven players on the line of scrimmage at all times. We have five offensive linemen, tight end and one wide receiver on the line of scrimmage.



The traditional numbering system for running and passing plays is that even numbered plays are to the right and odd numbered plays are to the left. Starting with the center, the center's right foot is the zero hole in the alignment and his left foot is the one hole. From there we move to gaps, which are the spaces between each individual lineman. The gap between the center and the guard is considered the two hole; moving out one spot is the four hole; moving out one more spot is considered the six hole; and anything outside of the tight end would be considered an eight hole play. Going to the left, the gap between the center and the guard is the three hole; moving out one more would be the five hole; and moving out one more spot would be the seven hole; and anything outside the tight end would be the nine hole.

There are a number of factors that make huddle organization important: Everything from making sure you have the correct number of players to making sure the right communication happens in the huddle because without that we can't have a proper play.

CHAPTER 4 - QUARTERBACK

COACH: Obviously the quarterback's mechanics are extremely important to his throwing motion. There are a number of different skills involved in playing quarterback and we're going to focus on throwing motion and footwork. The basic fundamentals of holding a football include putting the bottom three fingers on the laces. A lot of young kids will try to have the middle of their hand on the ball or possibly not even be using the laces so we teach that the bottom three fingers need to be on the laces and the top two will rotate onto the ball. We want players to have a nice, light touch. The ball is mainly held in the fingertips. You want to be able to see space between the player's hand and the football. You should be able to fit a pencil between the football and the player's hand. This light grip allows players to have a nice relaxed motion when throwing the football. The harder a player grips the football that creates tension and makes it difficult to have a nice release.



For the quarterback-center exchange as far as quarterbacks are concerned it is very important that they have nice opened fingers. Their throwing hand is on top, flat against the center. The non-throwing hand interlocks with both thumbs. Both hands are wide open and the ball contacts the upper hand and the bottom hand closes onto it. We stress for the quarterbacks not to reach for the ball or to have any space between their hand and the center. There should be a nice, tight fit and the quarterback waits for the ball to contact their top hand and then they simply close onto the ball. The center's job is to snap the ball up to his top hand and give him those laces so the quarterback can pretty quickly get back into his grip.

A quarterback drill that can be used is the Straight Arm Drill. Quarterbacks begin by putting their throwing side knee down on the ground. Right-handers put their right knee down and left-handers put their left knee down. The basic idea behind the drill is that we are working on the extension of their throwing arm. You want them to have a high release so in this drill the quarterbacks pick the ball off the ground; they hold it up as high as they can with a straight arm; and then pulling their arm down and through. Their partners should have their hands up to give the quarterback a target to throw to. As you're walking around you want to work on their arm extension; you don't want their arm to come down. Also, teach them to turn their thumb down and to the inside on their release. Most of the work in this drill is pulling the arm down and turning the wrist down. This is not a typical throwing motion but it benefits their high release and teaches them the proper wrist release. Remind players that the ball rotates off of their index finger as their thumb comes down.

The second drill focuses on upper body rotation. It is extremely important to have great upper body rotation when throwing the football. In this drill we have their toes facing their partner; their feet shoulder-width apart; and to have some bend in their knees. Players are going to be using their core muscles to rotate their body. We want to see the quarterbacks facing their target and then they will rotate all the way until their non-throwing shoulder is facing the target. At this point the ball is up and he throws it until his throwing shoulder is facing the target. It is very important to have a lot of rotation in the upper body. Very good mechanics allows players to have a better release and it creates a power source in the throwing motion so you really want to focus on taking the legs out of this drill and making this a rotational drill.

The Straight Line Drill helps players' movement toward their target. Players face their partner and turn sideways, pretending as though they are on a pitcher's mound. Players begin with the ball in a ready position. We want them to throw by stepping toward their target and finishing square. If they step right or left of the line they will be able to see that. It is important that the partners always have their hands up to provide a target. This works on body transfer, transferring weight from the back leg to the front leg, with all of the momentum going toward the target. Every time a player throws the ball he can get instant feedback by looking down at his feet to see how they were in terms of alignment and direction and seeing if their momentum was facing their target.

CHAPTER 5 - RUNNING BACKS

COACH: At this age level the running part of the game is really important because the passing isn't that developed yet. There are two stances that we work with: In the two-point stance you want players' feet to be about shoulder-width apart; and their hands are resting on their thigh pads. You don't want players leaning over and crouched over; you want them standing nice and tall so they can see over the line. One thing you see at this level is if players are going to run to the right they will look to the right before the snap so you want to make sure that players are looking straight ahead. If they want to look right that's fine, if they want to look left that's fine – maybe scan the defense – but what we don't want is for them to look in one direction. Again, with the two-point stance we want them standing nice and tall, not crouched over; and scanning the defense looking both right and left, not giving away the play.

In the three-point stance players widen their base, go down and crouch and the main thing is their head is going to be up so they can see who they are going to block. They are also square to the line so they are not leaning one way or the other. Often at this age players put their hand down on the ground and lean forward, but you don't want them leaning too far forward. Have them take their hand away and if they are balanced and not falling forward they are in good position.



When the running back receives the ball on the right-hand side of the quarterback the main thing is we want to make sure there is a good pocket: Players put their inside arm on top of their numbers on their jersey and bottom of the numbers for his outside arm. So the arm closest to the quarterback is up. As he goes through to receive the handoff the quarterback is actually going to put the ball in his pocket. A big mistake you'll see at all levels is that running backs will go through and reach for the ball and that causes a bad exchange. Once the quarterback puts the ball in his pocket he clamps down on it.

Another crucial part of the running game is the toss sweep. If we run a toss sweep to the left a play call may be like a 29, where we are going out wide to the nine hole. The main thing here is that the back wants to go nice and flat. A big mistake that you'll see from youngsters is that they want to run toward the quarterback and the quarterback is going to reverse out and it's going to be hard for him to pitch the ball because there won't be enough room for the pitch. When he receives the pitch he is going to secure it in his outside arm. You want running backs carrying the ball in their outside arm away from defenders. The quarterback tosses the ball out in front of where the running back is going to be. One of the key mistakes that is often made is the quarterback tosses the ball to where the running back is instead of where he is going to be.

The next thing we'll talk about is ball security. Sometimes you see young running backs carrying the ball out away from their body, or in one hand, but you want to make sure the tips of the ball are covered. You want one tip of the ball in your elbow next to your bicep. You want the ball to be carried nice and high so it's not as easy for a defender to get to it. If they are around a couple of defenders they can go to two hands and lower their pad level to get down low and take on contact.

A drill that can be used is the Gauntlet. Line two players up shoulder to shoulder. The running backs receive the handoff and run right through the gauntlet, simulating a game where you have contact. The defenders don't hit him hard, but they lean forward and simulate contact. The running backs make sure that they lower their pad level. Now this is a key thing because we're talking about injuries here. A lot of times younger players may want to lower their head and lead with the crown of their helmet and they don't want to do that because they could cause injury to themselves, like a neck injury, as well as to a defender because the helmet can be used as a weapon. When players initiate contact they should have two hands on the ball and be nice and low and as they run through they want to get their pad level down but keep their head up so they are running through and getting through contact. In this drill we want the running backs to get five yards past the gauntlet. Again, we're just trying to give the players a chance to initiate contact and have good ball security and get down low with the main thing is they have got to keep their head up. We don't want them to lead with their head. We want them to keep their neck safe and the defender's neck safe. Running backs play a big part of youth football because the passing game isn't developed yet.

CHAPTER 6 - RECEIVING

COACH: We'll introduce the basics of catching, route running and proper stance and alignment. When we talk about stance we want that front foot forward. We want to make sure we're in a sprinter's stance. We want to make sure that we have the three points of emphasis: That we have the foot, knee and chin aligned together. The hands are also rested in a spot that they are able to use them off the line of scrimmage – never resting the hands on the knees.



On this drill we work on players getting off the line of scrimmage, trying to get some explosion, some knee bend and stay down low like a sprinter. A couple reminders on stance: The front foot, chin and knee are aligned together; the knees are bent and the body is balanced; and making sure the hands are in position to not only run but to potentially fight off defenders.

When we talk about catching the football we always try to keep our emphasis on our eyes and obviously on our hands. When we have a ball that is above the waist we have the diamond formed with the thumb and the index finger and when the ball is below the waist all of a sudden now it is the pinkies together. If it is over the shoulder it is pinkies together. When the ball is caught emphasize securing the ball. We have a point of emphasis on the grip, a point of emphasis on the bicep and chest area.

When you talk about pass routes there are so many different routes you can use. The first route that is great to start with at any level is the hitch route, also called a stop route and sometimes called a curl route. Next, we'll move to a slant route and finally we'll go to a fade route, also termed a go route in some offensive schemes.

The first drill we'll do is a hitch route. The player drives off the line of scrimmage five yards, he plants with his outside foot, he turns and shows the quarterback his numbers, he secures the ball after the throw and catch, and then runs up the field.

The next route is the slant route. For this route the players widen out. The reason we widen out is to create a bigger window. If he's coming back in toward the quarterback it gives the quarterback a little bit more time and a little bit more area to throw the football in. Players push five yards and come in that slant angle; after the ball is caught it is secured and the players run upfield. When players make the slant break they snap their head and try to find the ball quickly.

The last route is called a fade route. Sometimes you'll get defenses that come in a little bit tighter. So what we'll say is if they're in tight we'll run by them. Players push up five yards and now they run by the defender. Notice that each one of these routes starts at five yards to put the defense in an awkward position. We'll either stop at five, run a slant at five, or we'll take off and go at five yards.

Always when we do receiving drills we want to put players in position to catch the ball at all different angles. The first drill is called a net drill. We'll have players catch the ball with one hand, with two hands, whether it's behind them or they have to go and get it. We start with over-the-shoulder catches, working on pinkies together. Players catch the ball, run through the 20 and then jog back into line. After we do a few throws you can have players try one-handed catches, or throw the ball behind them. Also, make sure you work both sides of the receiver's body so he gets to work on catching the ball from all different angles. To add a variation to this drill you can work it from sideline to sideline.

Another variation is the Distraction Drill. We pair the players up. The inside player is the distracter. He is allowed to do anything he wants as long as he doesn't touch the football or touch the offensive player. The receiver tries to catch the ball with the player distracting him.

Sometimes as a wide receiver he will make his break and sometimes the ball will be there sooner than he thinks so receivers have to be able to react quickly. The player turns his back to the coach. When he hears the word "go" he reacts and turns around and catches the ball and then sprints into the end zone.

CHAPTER 7 - OFFENSIVE LINE

COACH: We'll start with a two-point stance and the most important thing is the feet. Players have their inside foot forward. So players on the left side have their right foot up and the right side players have their left foot up. The toe of the outside leg lines up with the heel of the front foot. Players shouldn't be too wide or too narrow with their stance – basically the feet line up underneath their arm pits. From there, players drop their butts down and bend their knees. For a three-point stance players begin by dropping into their two-point stance; and players on the right side drop their right arm down to the ground and players on the left their left arm down to the ground; their head and eyes are up to read the defense. Most importantly for an offensive lineman is to keep as many cleats as possible in the ground. If players get up on their toes they will be off balance. Again, you want offensive lineman to have a solid base so that they can fire off the ball.



Run blocking

When the ball is snapped and they have driven out of their stance and they have engaged the defensive player what you want them to do is drive the defensive player. A lot of players get caught up on their toes and leaning forward and thinking that is where their power is going to come from. Once an offensive lineman has engaged a defensive player the footwork really becomes the most important thing. Obviously leverage is important so they want to have better leverage than the defender. Leverage means getting underneath the defensive player. When we talk about walking like a duck it means trying to keep as many cleats in the ground as possible

because that's where they'll have the most power. If you get good leverage and a good foot drive you'll have a great play.

Pass blocking

You want to be simple with this because at the youth league level you're going to have a simple scheme as far as passing goes and you just want players to get a helmet on another helmet. On the run block we want players to fire out and make contact with the defensive player and drive them back; pass blocking is just the opposite. The ball is snapped and we want players to give ground. You hear in the NFL talk about the pocket. We want to form a pocket for the quarterback to be able to sit in and find his receiver and throw the ball. We want players to get their hands up on the defensive player to keep him away as we give ground, keeping our cleats in the ground as much as possible. Going back to coaching points: Stress the footwork - outside leg first, then inside leg, keep the hands up to keep the defensive player away, create the pocket and allow the quarterback time to throw the football.

CHAPTER 8 - TIGHT-ENDS

COACH: A tight-end's three-point stance is not too different from a guard or tackle's three-point stance. A tight-end is involved as a run blocker more than he is as a pass blocker, but as offenses have evolved over the years the tight-end has become a more viable option in the passing game. When a defender plays on the outside shoulder of a tight-end a great move to use is the rip technique. What the player does from his three-point stance is with his down hand he raises up and makes contact with the defensive player and uses his opposite arm to rip, like an uppercut, and he works what is called a speed route or an out route and as he is working this out he is getting width and depth at the same time. What that means is he is not running a one-yard route and then is getting tackled. We want him working five yards to get yards after catching the ball. When the quarterback puts the ball in his hands he's able to get north and south as quick as possible.



CHAPTER 9 - DEFENSIVE HUDDLE

COACH: The middle linebacker calls the defense in the huddle. When he calls a 4-3 defense we have two tackles, two defensive ends, three linebackers, most use the terms Sam, Mike and Will linebacker. The Sam is to the strength side of the formation, the Mike is the middle linebacker and the Will is the weak linebacker that goes away from the strength side. We have four defensive backs – two corners and two safeties. In a 4-3 defense we call our strength call to the tight-end. So in this formation the nose tackle goes away from the strength call, as he is a shade to the right of the center, and the weak side end goes to the outside of the tackle. The Sam

linebacker lines up at linebacker depth, about 3-5 yards from the line of scrimmage. He lines up to the inside of the tackle. The Mike linebacker lines up in the gap uncovered between the center and guard and the weakside linebacker lines up on the outside of the guard because he needs to



protect the gap. With the secondary, depending on how you want to play it, some coaches use a field corner and a boundary corner meaning when the ball is on the hash one player will always play to the field and one player will always play to the boundary, and some coaches play a left corner and a right corner; and the two safeties are over the top. This is often called a two-high look or a two-safety look.

CHAPTER 10 - 3-4 DEFENSE

COACH: As a coach you may determine that you don't have a lot of defensive linemen so the 3-4 is good to use because only three down linemen are used. After players break the huddle we have a nose tackle who is directly over the center. There is no shading, he is directly across from the center. We call the nose tackle a two-gap player because he has two gaps. He controls the center and reads the play off the center. We have two tackles that we call a five technique, meaning they are head up on that tackle and the same thing is true as they are going to try and control both gaps. When they shoot off the ball they are going to get their hands on the tackle and try to control him and try to read the flow of the backfield or read that tackle. The difference with this formation is there are two inside linebackers. What a lot of teams do is they'll have a strong linebacker who may be bigger and a little more physical and they may have a weaker player, almost like a Will in the 4-3, that is a little quicker and he is the backside linebacker. They are both about four yards off the ball and they are head up on the guards. They are responsible for filling as fast as they can based on what the guard does. One of the main differences here is that there are two outside linebackers and their job is to read the tackle. For example, if the tackle down blocks, showing that it's a run, they are going to run upfield and hit the first opposing jersey they see. They are contain players meaning they can not let anyone get outside of them. If they were to read a pass drop, meaning that tackle moves back as though he is going to pass protect, then they go to their secondary read and figure out what's happening with the receiver near them. Behind we have a cover two shell, the same look we had in the 4-3. The corners are responsible for the flat area, which is anywhere from the line of scrimmage to 8 to 10 yards deep; and we have our two-high safety look where they have from the middle of the field all the way to the sidelines. The corners' job is to funnel everything inside, not letting anything outside of them; and the safeties' job is that obviously they can not get beat deep. This is a basic 3-4; you can also slant the defensive linemen one way or another.



CHAPTER 11 - TACKLING

COACH: The first rule of tackling is that we want to be safe. As coaches when you teach kids how to tackle we want to be aggressive and physical and we want to run fast but the main thing is we want both kids healthy after the play is done so we want to make sure it is done correctly. We want the player's feet square and we want the neck back and we never want to make the first thing that makes contact to be the top of the helmet. Some coaches teach that way but it's not a safe way to do it. We want the facemask up so players can see what they are hitting. When the player hits he delivers a blow by running through the ball carrier. The player's hands are in holsters – they're cocked and loaded. When the player tackles besides bringing his hips and legs he uses his arms to violently strike and the main thing is he puts his helmet across the bow to the ball side. If possible, he puts his helmet right through the ball, which is ideal, but the main thing is the helmet never strikes the center of the other player's body because that's how injuries occur. Some important coaching points to remember: Have a good stance, get a low center of gravity, the neck is bold and we always want the helmet across the bow. If he is attacking a good running back and the defender gets his head to the opposite side he's going to spin out of it. In conclusion, anytime players are tackling there doesn't have to be a big distance between them. You can get a lot of practice reps two or three feet apart. Again, get a good base, bold the neck, use the idea of guns in a holster and shoot the hands, and we want players to use their feet and run through every tackle.

Tackling drill

What we're going to do here is get some spacing between the ball carrier and the defender. The defender begins in a great stance: his hips are sunk, his guns are going to be in his holsters and his neck is going to be bold so he is safe. Now one of the problems we're seeing today and it starts at the youth league is you see all these shoulder tackles and that's because the fundamentals of wrapping have not been taught. This is a great drill for this, and we start off at 50 percent speed. Getting the wrap is the most important key to this. Once we bring the wrap we bring the most important part of football with us. All our strength comes from our core, hips and thighs, that's why the power clean, dead lift and squat are the most important lifts in football. We want to maintain safety the whole time. The way to maintain safety is to have great technique and great form.



Angle tackle drill

Another variation is the angle tackle. Many times when we are in pursuit we need to make a tackle at an angle. In this simulation the ball carrier starts off going to the right and the defender must take the proper pursuit angle. In case the running back decides to cut back we're in the correct position to take back the cut-back lane. There are too many times when a running back can stop, change directions on us, and he has us beat. Which is why when he makes his tackle his

helmet needs to be on the ball side of the running back, especially when attacking with the angle tackle. Once he makes the tackle you want to make sure that he continues to run his feet because one of the mistakes that is often made at the younger levels is that on contact players stop their feet. Never stop your feet as a defender, that's how a player will get hurt. One thing that the defender wants to do is that once he has him wrapped and is driving him he wants to try and get his shoulder and body turned square. If he has him turned square he's not getting drug by the running back and giving up yards after contact. We want to stop the running back dead in his tracks and drive him backwards so he is getting negative yards on the play. This is a great drill to take the angle away from the ball carrier and making sure that we are forcing him to cut back to where all the bad guys are at on the inside.

CHAPTER 12 - DEFENSIVE STANCES

COACH: For a three-point stance the player wants to have a wide base. The other key thing is to keep his head up to see what the blocking scheme is and to see where the running back is so he can make a tackle for a loss for his team. In his stance his butt will be a little bit higher than his shoulder blades, and the neck is bold once again. Unlike an offensive lineman, we are putting pressures on our knuckles on the ground because there is no read to give away. They know that the defensive linemen are coming, so defensive linemen should be ready to fire off and fire into the offensive linemen. We want defensive linemen to fire off as low as they can. With the nose tackle his knee should split the mid-region of the center. The inside hand is the up hand and the inside foot is back. The defensive lineman needs to be able to stay low enough and fire out low enough to defeat the offensive lineman because otherwise as soon as you pop up you are beat. We know in this game that the low man wins.

Takeoffs



One of the first things we do every day in practice is takeoffs. We line the four linemen up and the back-up linemen behind them. We place cones 1½ yards away. That's the deepest a defensive lineman should ever get. If a defensive lineman gets any deeper than that he's going to get screened, get drawn or get a cutback against an inside zone, which you do not want to happen. Once the players fire off they are going to bend where the ball carrier is going to. We have cones set up which are the finishing point where these players will finish at. Almost every drill that you do I recommend having a finish point, because once kids get through a drill they'll stop, so have a finish point that they have to sprint through. It keeps an order to your drills and keeps it simplified. Players fire off the line to the cone and then bend toward the imaginary ball carrier. The entire time you do this drill you are checking out their technique. You want to look at their stances, see if their heads are staying up and if they are firing out low. This is one of the first things we do every day in individual practice.

Hoop Drill

A great drill to keep kids low as they fire off the ball is to use hoops. You can use anything you want, you don't have to spend hundreds of dollars, you can make these at home. What we also use is a stick with a ball on it, which you can also make at home. The player begins in a three-point stance and what it is going to teach him to do is that as soon as the coach moves the ball he fires off and comes to the right and bends to the hoop as tight as possible and finishes at the cone. This teaches them to stay low the entire time and run through their finish point. The teaching point is to stay as low and as tight to the hoop as possible. We want the players to over-exaggerate this; we want their hands on the ground. We want them to be touching the turf so they are ready to bend and rip around the line of scrimmage. You want players to fire off and sprint around the hoop.

CHAPTER 13 - LINEBACKERS

COACH: Linebackers play a key role in any defensive scheme because they have to be able to play the run as well as the pass. A good linebacker stance involves having their feet underneath their arm pits – you don't want players to be too wide or too narrow because they won't have any base underneath them. The weight should be on the players' instep, underneath their big toe, so they have good balance. Next, they need a good bend in their knees, with their eyes looking forward and their chest out. Hands go on the thigh pads with their elbows in. The reason players keep their elbows in is when offensive linemen come to attack players have to be able to use their hands. If their elbows are out they won't have any power. They need to be nice and tight and compact.

First Step Drill

We have a line of four. I'll give these players a direction just to work on their first step. Players bend their knees and keep their elbows in. What we are trying to simulate is the first step. The first step depends on which way the running back goes. If he steps to his right, which we call flow, the linebackers flow in that direction to match the running back.



Pass drop

The linebackers begin with a great stance, have a great first step and once he recognizes a pass he's going to drop back at a 45 degree angle and intercept the ball, yell "bingo" and run the ball back. You can get a lot of players involved in this drill and do a lot of repetitions in a short amount of time. That's a very good drill to use for linebackers to help recognize a pass.

Dealing with blocks

Now at this point we'll simulate an offensive lineman coming to block the linebacker. He has to engage the offensive lineman, destruct the block and form up on the ball carrier, which can be another player or a coach. In this drill the offensive lineman gives him a nice big target, our linebacker is in a great stance, and on "go" he attacks the blocker, disrupts him, uses a rip move, and comes up on the ball carrier.

CHAPTER 14 - DEFENSIVE BACKS

COACH: A defensive back drill that we start a lot of our practices with is we'll get three, four or five players out, depending on how many you have, and we'll get them in a good stance. A good stance for a defensive back is to have the feet staggered, where one foot is about halfway back from the opposite foot, and about shoulder-width apart. The arms dangle, nice and loose and the player's nose, knees and toes should all be over one another. Their chest and butt are also down so the player is feeling pretty athletic.

On the whistle players crawl, doing the slowest backpedal possible in a good stance. Then on the next whistle players go to a walk with a little faster pace, swinging the arms. On the next whistle



players backpedal as fast as they can. The players' heads should never come up during the drill. Their heads should be at the same level as it is in their stance. As a coach one of the things you want to look for is that they are staying low the entire time. Just because players are changing their speed in their backpedal their head should never come up or go down, it should stay at the same height the entire time. Next, we'll

add one more thing to it. As they get good at this the final command is a turn. So often as a defensive back they have to turn their hips and sprint. So we'll start with a crawl, walk, sprint and when I say "turn" players turn and sprint. The key is that their heads should never raise up, even when they turn and sprint. They want to turn and sprint, find the line, and go as fast as they can. To be a defensive back players have to be able to change direction and change speeds without raising their pad levels too much. You want players to stay at one level as long as they can.

W Drill

Another drill we'll do with defensive backs is called the W drill. There are a lot of variations you can do with this drill. We have players start in a good stance and we set up cones in a W. Players backpedal around the cone and quickly change direction at the first cone. There are two ways you can teach changing directions. Some teach a T-step, where they take their back foot and turn it to form the top of the T and change direction; and others teach taking two steps and changing direction with their hips. A lot depends on the weather, the type of kids you have and how quick their feet are. It's up to you as a coach. So during this drill the kids backpedal, sprint, backpedal and sprint, finishing through the last cone. You always want to stress that they finish every drill they start. A couple coaching points to keep in mind during this drill: You want to watch the

heads of the kids, they should never raise up. They should be at the same level every time. During practice we might do the first few rotations at the walking or crawling pace that we demonstrated in the previous drill and as the kids get better, especially the older kids, we'll go at a 50 percent or a full backpedal. You always want to check for their head, their hips and their feet – before you worry about their speed you want to focus on technique.

The last thing we'll do is add a football to this drill. You can have a coach, an injured player or a helper handle this part – when the kids come through to the last cone a ball is thrown to them and they work on catching the ball and looking it in and use whatever term your team uses. Some teams use “bingo” or “ice” on an interception. So whatever your team's buzzword is have the players yell that out after they've caught the football. You always want players to yell a word to let teammates know they now have the ball. So now we want to incorporate a good backpedal and a change of direction and they are going to sprint through and catch a ball and yell “bingo” to simulate an interception. Another thing you can do is have the ball rolled to them as a fumble as they come through so the kids can work on scooping the ball up and scoring. Or you can add the fetal position where the kids will recover the ball and get down and protect themselves in that fetal position. It's just another way to add something on to the top of the drill.

CHAPTER 15 - CONCLUSION

MATT YUNKER: Coaches, we hope you've enjoyed today's training video. These kids put a lot of hard work into making this a first-class feature and we wish you the best in this upcoming season.



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