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Offensive line coaches' training manual

Sean N. Powers
Ithaca College

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OFFENSIVE LINE COACHES' TRAINING MANUAL

A Project Presented to the Faculty of
the Division of Health, Physical
Education, and Recreation
Ithaca College

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Degree
Master of Science

by
Sean N. Powers
September 1990

Ithaca College
Division of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation
Ithaca, New York

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER OF SCIENCE PROJECT

This is to certify that the Master of Science Project of

Sean N. Powers

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in the Division of
Health, Physical Education, and Recreation of Ithaca
College has been approved.

Project Advisor:

Candidate:

Chairman, Graduate
Programs in Physical
Education:

Date:

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family, Patrick Powers, the late Eileen Powers, and the late Garnette Powers.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this training manual is to provide the high school and college coach with a complete guide of the necessary fundamentals of offensive line play. A specific offensive system is not discussed here. The techniques and fundamentals in this text can be used no matter what type of offense is run.

The material begins with how a coach may select players for the offensive line and continues with the basics of offensive line play, namely the stance and start. A section on teaching and drill philosophy has been included to give the coach food for thought. The manuscript progresses to the various blocks. Both individual and combination techniques have been included. This manual also includes a complete pass blocking section as well as a section on pulling.

This manual has been illustrated with both pictures and diagrams depicting correct as well as incorrect technique. As the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words." The idea for this manual comes from the desire to create the type of resource I would have liked to have had when I was first assigned to coach the offensive line. I sincerely hope that a young coach who must coach the offensive line will find this guide helpful. I would also hope that a more experienced coach might find some useful information.

blocks that make the offense go.

A lineman seldom finds his name in headlines. I know for I was one myself. The band seldom plays for him, but when he does his job he knows it. Blocking is the key to winning offensive football.

Offensive linemen seldom get the credit due them, but their personal satisfaction lies in knowing that they are part of the successful whole. (Flynn, 1973, p. 68)

We will now focus our attention on the attributes a good offensive lineman must possess both physically and mentally. As it was pointed out earlier, offensive line play is more given to technique than is the defensive line play. Of course, an offensive lineman must meet the minimum requirements of size and strength, but there are many other factors to consider.

Probably the most important physical characteristic for an offensive lineman is quickness. Quickness off the ball is without a doubt the most important factor in controlling the line of scrimmage. A good offensive lineman may not be the fastest player in the 40-yard dash, but all good offensive linemen are quick in their movement for the first 5 or 10 yards.

Offensive linemen who do not totally understand the offense they are running or the defense they are facing often will appear to lack good quickness when in reality they are slowed by indecision, not physical limitation. More often than not, intelligence and quickness go hand in hand. Both players and coaches must realize this.

Explosiveness is another characteristic to look for. Does the player lean into the block or does he deliver a sharp blow on contact? There are some players who instinctively know how to use their legs, arms, and hips to get maximum force. These players will make the best offensive linemen.

Strength is another important factor in playing the line. In the running game he must be strong enough to move a defender of equal size by brute force. In the passing game, the offensive lineman must possess the strength necessary to stop the rusher's charge at the line of scrimmage and maintain that position.

Any good football player must have balance and the offensive lineman is no exception. Balance is very

simply having the ability to control one's center of gravity. In the running game, the blocker must have enough balance and control to execute the different individual and combination blocking techniques he must perform, as well as have the ability to stay on the block when the defender is trying to escape. As a pass blocker, he must be able to slide and mirror the defender, maintaining the proper position on his opponent despite being pulled, grabbed, and pushed in all different directions.

These are the basic physical characteristics an offensive lineman must possess. It must be stressed that all of these physical factors can and must be worked on and improved. We will discuss the development of skill and technique in detail later on.

Let us now focus our attention on the mental and emotional characteristics that are essential in a good offensive lineman. We have already discussed intelligence, but there are other factors as well.

Probably one of the most important qualities a lineman can have is unselfishness. Offensive linemen must be willing to work hard for little or no recognition outside of what they receive from their coaches and teammates. They must realize, however, that without them, there is no glory for the backs and receivers. "I play guard," said Howard Mudd, formerly of the San Francisco 49ers, "because I love playing football. It's true that you don't get much recognition, but your teammates usually know and appreciate the job you do. And peer group recognition is more important to me than popular acclaim" (Townsend, 1973, p. 67). According to former Cleveland Brown and Cincinnati Bengal Coach Paul Brown, "To be an outstanding offensive lineman, a man must be a self-starter. He must be able to motivate himself and he must take pride in his performance. He can't be a man who needs glory" (Townsend, 1973, p. 68).

A lineman must also be disciplined. He must have the discipline to start on the count, to know his assignments, and to not commit penalties. An offensive lineman must also have the discipline to continue to do the best he can, even if the results are not immediate. He must realize that only with self-discipline, hard work, and experience will the techniques that he must learn be mastered.

Because of the obscurity of his position, an offensive lineman must have a great deal of inner confi-

dence. Unlike a quarterback or running back, there are few if any statistics to reinforce his performance or self-esteem. He must believe he is a good performer, capable of blocking any opponent he may face. Without this confidence, an offensive lineman will be thinking about being defeated and not focusing on what he must do on every play. Confidence is something that must be developed and this is an area in which a coach must play a critical role. By constant repetition and positive reinforcement, a lineman will become confident in his own and the team's ability. With this confidence in place, success will soon follow.

Toughness and aggressiveness are the last two factors that should be present in a good offensive lineman. A lineman must be physically tough. He must be able to stand up under the constant physical punishment he receives on every play. According to Ron Mix, former offensive tackle with the Oakland Raiders, "On every play, I don't care what it is, even if it's in a controlled scrimmage, the tackle makes contact. It's pound, pound, pound, and nobody knows except you, the guy you are pounding, and maybe the coach" (Townsend, 1973, p. 66).

The offensive lineman must be willing to play with a little pain. Offensive timing depends on the coordinated efforts of the five men up front. These men are used to working together and know exactly what to expect from one another. If there is one member who is constantly leaving the game with little injuries, the offense's timing will be disrupted.

Aggressiveness is something that a football player is born with. It is very hard to coach an athlete to be aggressive. A certain amount of aggressiveness is necessary in a good offensive lineman. When the other factors such as size, quickness, and strength are equal, it is the mental edge that determines which player will dominate the other. The more aggressive player will wear down his opponent with relentless physical play. It is this relentless effort of the offensive line that separates great teams from good ones.

One of the greatest offensive linemen of all time was Bob Brown, who played for the Philadelphia Eagles and the Los Angeles Rams from the mid 60s to the early 70s. His philosophy of offensive line play should give the reader some insight as to the psychological make-up of a superior offensive lineman.

Instead of being a shock absorber, I'm the one who is transmitting the shock. I unload on them. I like to compare my style to a sledge hammer. It's not fancy, but it works. I don't try to hit the shoulder pads or anything else that's padded. I like to go after the soft spots underneath the pads. I like to hit spots that are tender, that I know are sensitive and consequently transmit a considerable amount of pain. I think the universal quotient for this particular occupation is pain. And regardless of whom I'm playing against, if I apply enough pain, I can break the guy down. This is how I approach the game—applying pain constantly. When I think I've got a guy in trouble, I apply pain in the area where I think I'm hurting him the most. I just keep gnawing away at that spot because I know eventually I'm going to wear him down and he's going to slow down. (Stainback, 1970, p. 83)

The personal pride and satisfaction of being an offensive lineman are perhaps summed up by Ron Mix in this way:

Playing in the line is a very personal matter. It is intimate. You are working in close quarters with teammates and against opponents. There is a great deal of mutual respect. And in how many jobs do you find that? Another thing is the personal satisfaction. The satisfaction is real because it is uncluttered and immediate. You either did your job on that block or you didn't. You were either beaten or you won. Football is one of the few jobs where the rewards, the satisfactions, the results are clear cut and immediate. And boy, you can feel them. When was the last time you saw a bunch of salesmen or lawyers or butchers jumping up and down and hugging each other and damn near crying with joy over a sale or winning a case or carving a side of beef? (Townsend, 1973, p. 69)

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the physical, mental, and emotional characteristics necessary to play offensive line. Though football is a complex game of strategy and tactics, it is still played by men. Players are not simply Xs and Os on a blackboard. In this chapter, the author has tried to give the reader some insight into offensive line play by exploring the thoughts and emotions of the men who play the game.

PERSONNEL SELECTION

Once the coach has selected the athletes with the proper physical, mental, and emotional characteristics necessary to play offensive line, he must put them at the right position. In general, offensive line play is the same for every position. More specifically, there are a wide range of differences in technique at every position. Considering these differences, it is extremely important that the proper athlete is at the proper position so he can achieve his maximum potential.

The Center

The modern center must be a much better athlete than his predecessors. The most popular modern defense is the 5-2 or a variation of it, which puts one of its fastest and many times best athletes, the nose guard, right over the center. The center is primarily responsible for this man on both run and pass plays. This assignment is made more difficult because his first responsibility is to snap the ball back to the quarterback. This means his first movement does nothing to help him handle the nose guard. Either one or both of his arms are moving backward as he moves forward on the run or sets for the pass. Even when facing an even defense, where the center does not have a defensive lineman aligned on him, the center still has the difficult task of blocking the middle linebacker, who is usually the best athlete in an even defense.

When considering these factors, the coach should give a great deal of thought to the selection of a center. In the past, many coaches would put their largest, slowest player at center. Linemen who could not fit in elsewhere were hidden at center. Odd defenses, where the center has a nose guard aligned across from him, were virtually non-existent. The center was the only man on the offensive line who was not engaged in violent physical confrontation on almost every play. Even when assigned to block the middle linebacker, his task was not as physically demanding, as linebackers are usually more intent on *avoiding* contact than in charging into an offensive blocker. If an inferior athlete were put at center against present-day defenses, the offense would have a difficult time running an offensive play because the nose guard would be in the backfield with the snap of the ball.

Quickness is perhaps the most important factor in choosing a center. He must be quick enough to snap the ball and at the same time execute his block on the nose guard or linebacker. The center must possess extremely quick feet, because a long first step will cause the nose guard to beat him on the play.

Intelligence and discipline are also important at this position. The center must be able to recognize defenses and make calls and adjustments at the line of scrimmage. He is also responsible for setting and organizing the huddle. Often, the coach will find the center to be one of his best leaders.

The Guard

The offensive guard must be a versatile football player. The guard must be able to perform a larger variety of skills than anyone else on the offensive line. He must have the strength to block straight ahead on the run against a down lineman who is usually bigger and quicker than he is. At the same time, he must have the quickness to block the linebacker in an odd defense. He must pass protect. Speed is more important for a guard because he must pull to lead on outside plays and he must trap block defensive linemen. Most of the defensive recognition and block adjustments are handled by the center and tackles, so the guard has a limited amount of thinking to do once he reaches the line.

The Tackle

The offensive tackle is usually the largest offensive lineman. He is almost always taller than the guard, which is of extreme importance when protecting the passer. The taller he is and the longer his arms are, the more difficult it becomes for the defensive player to use his hands to pull him off balance to get by him. The tackle must be a superior run blocker. He must be able to hold his blocks in the run game for a longer period of time than the guard or center when the play is designed to go outside him, because the running back has to travel a greater distance to reach the tackle area than the center or guard area.

The tackle must also be an outstanding pass blocker because he will have to carry out his assignment alone with little or no help from the center or guard in most situations. Of the two tackles, the quicker, better pass blocker must be positioned on the quarterback's "blind" side. For a right-handed quarterback, the left tackle must be a better pass blocker. The reason for this is when the right-handed quarterback

takes his pass drop, his back is turned toward the left side of the line. If the left tackle is not a good pass blocker, the quarterback will have little chance of evading a blind side tackle by the defender who has beaten the left tackle.

The tackle is usually the slowest offensive lineman. He will spend the majority of his time working in a 5-yard square, and all-out speed is not as important as quickness.

Many offenses use the tackle to call the blocking adjustments at the line of scrimmage so he must be intelligent and have the ability to recognize different defenses.

Once the coach has selected his offensive linemen and placed them at the proper positions, he must teach them the proper techniques necessary to carry out their assignments. With the possible exception of quarterback, offensive line is the most difficult position to learn. At each the high school, college and professional levels, you will rarely find a freshman or rookie starting on the offensive line. To become an outstanding offensive lineman requires long, hard hours of preparation both on and off the field.

DRILL PHILOSOPHY

In addition to providing a complete guide of fundamentals for the coach, the purpose of this manual is to provide the coach with a variety of coaching points as well as key phrases helpful in facilitating learning. Throughout the manual, key phrases will be highlighted with quotation marks. These key phrases should help to convey the concept being taught to the player, providing him with a "mental picture" of the skill. The coaching points are intended to emphasize certain elements of the skills being taught. The most common errors that occur in the performance of the offensive line techniques and how to correct them have also been included.

Before we move on to discuss the fundamentals, techniques, and drills involved in coaching the offensive line, the author would like to provide the reader with some thoughts on effective coaching and teaching. The coach should strive to create an environment in which players not only succeed, but want to learn and have fun doing it. Even though football is physically and mentally demanding, it is, after all, a game. It should be challenging but it should also be fun.

Each drill is designed to teach one skill or technique that will help a player improve, regardless of the particular offense used by his team. Drills must teach and develop the basic skills every player needs to be successful at his position, helping to build a solid foundation of fundamentals.

It is important for the coach to vary the drills daily, to constantly challenge his players without subjecting them to endless repetition. Boredom is one of the greatest enemies of learning, especially in football. Practice time must be interesting and focused, not disorganized. For example, while the offensive linemen must practice blocking every day, the actual blocking drill should vary somewhat with each practice. A series of short, crisp, and well-defined drills that concentrate on only one skill at a time will keep the players' attention and help eliminate long, tedious practice sessions.

Certain elements are crucial to each skill, and it is the responsibility of the coach to make certain that he positions himself properly to oversee his players form and technique. Players must never be allowed to simply "go through the motions." The old adage "Practice doesn't make perfect, perfect practice

makes perfect" rings true and no coach should ever pass up an opportunity to improve a player's performance. There is no detail too small to be overlooked in the pursuit of excellence.

If there are certain skills the coach wants his players to have, he must not just talk about them, he must have his players practice them. The coach must let his players know what he wants and then teach them how to do what he wants. He must never take anything for granted.

It is better to run most drills with only offensive players. Having offensive linemen assume the roles of defensive players in practice serves two purposes: First, the coach can work as long as necessary with his unit without wasting the practice time of another group. Second, a player's ability to perform his techniques is greatly enhanced when he understands the techniques of the defenders he will be facing. For example, an offensive lineman will be a better pass blocker if he has had the experience of being a pass rusher in practice. A coach who thinks he is helping his starters by giving them a rest and not subjecting them to playing the roles of their opponents is actually depriving them of a valuable learning opportunity. This method is especially helpful in early season practices.

Eventually, the real defensive players will be added to most drills. This can have both a positive and negative effect. The positive effect is that the offensive linemen will get a chance to work against defenders who are skilled at their positions, which better simulates game conditions. On the negative side, a high degree of competition may enter the drills, making them more combative than instructional.

Most drills should begin at a relatively slow pace. This is true especially when contact is involved. The coach must make certain that all players are using correct technique and have overcome their natural fear of contact before increasing the speed of the drill. The reader will notice that the preliminary run and pass blocking progressions, which will be discussed later, begin with the blockers in a "fit" position. The "fit" position is used to show each player the ideal block and what it feels like. From the fit, the drill progresses to one and two step contact and finishes with a "full go."

It is important to run most drills to the right and to the left. The coach wants his players to be "ambidextrous," so to speak. Regardless of the drill, players should never be allowed to practice bad habits or

incorrect techniques. This will only reinforce the unwanted behavior. Poor technique must be pointed out immediately, corrected, and practiced the right way. It may be beneficial to break down the technique into small segments to analyze what is being done wrong. The coach should correct mistakes and provide encouragement rather than berating a player who is having a difficult time with a specific phase of the game. Yelling at a player will only cause him to lose confidence in himself. Negative coaching will have negative results. A player must be told what to do instead of what not to do.

The best way to stop or end most drills is by blowing a whistle. This conditions players to respond to the sound that stops play in a game. Conversely, all drills should begin with the cadence used by the particular team.

One final note: Do not neglect physical conditioning. Drills that have a conditioning side effect, such as sled work, should be included in the daily routine. Football is a demanding sport that requires strength and endurance. Offensive linemen need to be in top physical condition to perform their techniques and avoid injury. The coach should make certain that his linemen work on flexibility and aerobic capacity, and not just strength or bulk building exercises as they often tend to do.

DRIVE BLOCKING

Blocking involves the proper use of leverage, body alignment, and energy. The proper use of leverage begins with striking an initial blow and channeling all of the force up and through the defender at a 45-degree angle. The 45-degree angle along which the force is applied is known as the line of force (Mallory, 1987, p. 73). The blocker must strike at a point low enough to create a lifting force on the defender and close enough to neutralize his charge. He must separate the defender's upper body strength from the power of his hips and legs. The blocker must continue to apply force at a 45-degree angle to get the defender back on his heels so he is unable to make a counter move. Driving the defender from a low plane to a high plane is called a steady high pressure control (Mallory, 1987, p. 73). The blocker must be taught to concentrate on "hitting up and through the defender."

The proper alignment of the body within the 45-degree angle of attack or desired line of force is essential. The head, fists, forearms, back, hips, legs, and feet must all be aligned for maximum force. The head provides direction, and the body will follow the head. The fists and forearms provide the blocking surface. The back serves as a ramrod which links the lower body to the upper body. The hips and legs are the basic power source; they create the force. The feet create and maintain movement.

There are two forms of energy, the first being potential energy, which is defined as energy at rest. For our purposes, the potential energy of a blocker is when he is in his stance. A good stance with all of the body parts correctly aligned is essential, otherwise the blocker cannot fire out properly and apply maximum force. The second form of energy is kinetic energy, which is defined as energy in motion. Kinetic energy as it applies to the drive block begins with the lineman's start and continues through the contact phase and the follow through of the block.

Before we move on, it is important to discuss the basic football position as it relates to the application of force in the drive block. Every skill that a football player performs will start either from this position or he will move through it at some point. The feet are shoulder width apart and pointing straight ahead with the weight on the balls of the feet. The heels are slightly off the ground. The knees bend until the

thighs are parallel to the ground. The butt is down and the back is arched and not hunched forward. The shoulders should be square over the knees. The arms hang straight down by his side. This basic position is involved in blocking and pass protection(Photo A).

The theory of the football or "hitting" position is to create power-producing angles that will allow the player to apply force effectively in the execution of his skills. Power-producing angles are created in the ankle, knee, and hip joints. If the player's knees are bent, he will have the opportunity to produce and exert power. If the knees are not bent, the player will have no power. A player who cannot bend his knees will have a difficult time playing football.

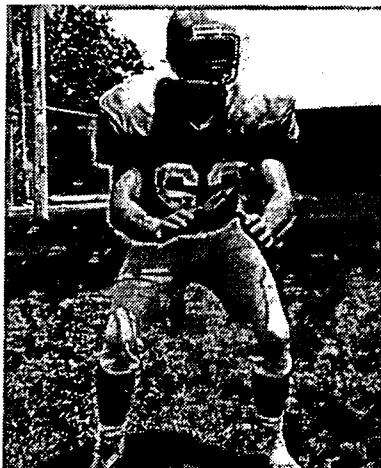


Photo A

Initial Advantages

Initially, a blocker has four advantages over the defender. They are as follows:

1. Knowledge of the snap count
2. The direction of the ball
3. The proper use of leverage
4. The proper alignment

We will now discuss these initial advantages in further detail.

The Snap Count

It is important to remember that the offensive blocker knows the snap count while the defense must react to the movement of the offense. By concentrating on the snap count and exploding on the count, the blocker can greatly enhance the speed with which he gets to the defender. The faster the blocker can get to the contact point, the better off he will be. The players must be sold on the fact that the faster they can get there, the less time the defender will have to react and develop block protection. It is possible and should be expected that the blocker should be able to make contact before the defender has taken more than one step. To sum up, the quicker the blocker can get into the defender and get his hands inside before the defender can develop block protection, the less the blow the defender can generate and the easier it will be to control the defender.

Where the Play is Going

In addition to knowing the snap count, the offensive blocker knows where the play is going, while the defense must react and find the football.

Proper Use of Leverage

When discussing the proper use of leverage, it is important to have a clear understanding of aiming points or targets. Every play has an aiming point, and knowing where the ball is coming from and where the ball is going will determine the aiming point. In general, there are two basic aiming points that a blocker should understand. When assigned to block a defensive lineman, the aiming point is underneath the chin (Photo A). In blocking a linebacker, the aiming point is the bottom of the numbers (Photo B). There are, of course, variations based on where the play is going, for instance: inside number, outside number, near hip, far hip, etc.

By concentrating on and striking the appropriate aiming point, the blocker will be in a position to apply the proper use of leverage because if he strikes the aiming point, he will automatically be lower than his opponent. On the snap of the football, every defensive lineman will rise up with the movement of the offensive line. As the defensive lineman rises in preparation to meet the charge of the blocker, the

offensive man will now see the defender's numbers. By aiming at the defender's chin, the blocker will wind up striking the defender as he rises. Teach the blocker to "sight through the chin to the numbers" (Goode, 1978, p. 50).



By exploding into the aiming point on the snap count, the blocker will ideally make contact with the defender as he is rising up to start his charge. The quicker the blocker can make contact with the defender, the less time the defender will have to react. The initial lunge must be forward and as parallel to the ground as possible. If the blocker is too high, the defender will destroy the blocker's power line with a blow underneath the shoulder pads.

Proper Alignment

In a discussion of proper alignment, it is important to explore the various theories on determining line splits. Splits are taken to keep the defensive team continually at a disadvantage. Good judgment must be exercised by each offensive lineman when determining the amount of split that he will take. He must make sure that the split he takes does not deprive him of his advantage. The initiative must be with the blocker.

There are two reasons for taking splits. One is to get a better blocking angle, the other is to spread the defense. Typically, teams that rely a lot on cross blocking, fold blocking, and trapping will vary their

splits to create blocking angles. Option teams, on the other hand, take splits for the sole purpose of spreading the defense. If the defense does not spread with the offense, blocking angles will result. For example, let us consider the guards' split versus an even defense. Diagram A shows the defensive tackles' alignment when the offensive guards take a normal split and Diagram B illustrates the results when a maximum split is take by the guards. It is obvious that there is more distance between the defensemen when the guards are split versus when they are tight.

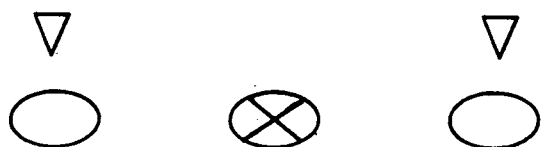


Diagram A

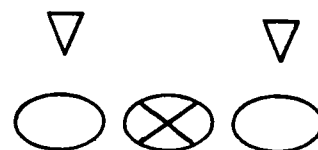


Diagram B

Distance between defensive tackles is greater when offensive splits are widened. If the defenders do not widen with the offensive man, blocking angles will result. If the play is run to the right, the right guard has an easy blocking angle on the defender as shown in Diagram C.

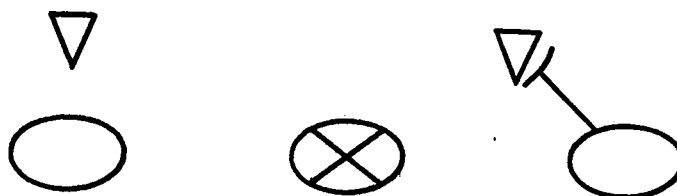


Diagram C

In order to use splits more effectively, it is important for the offense to understand how the defense thinks. In establishing defensive spacing, one of two methods must be used. The coach will tell his defensive linemen to:

1. Line up opposite a certain part of the offensive lineman, for instance, head on his nose, inside eye to outside eye, inside foot to outside foot, etc.
2. Keep a certain distance between themselves and their teammates on each side. Regardless of the offensive splits the defenders will maintain their established distance from each other.

The blocker must be aware of these ideas and determine which of the two methods mentioned is being used by the defense. If the defense is using method 1 (lining up on a certain portion of the offensive lineman), it is apparent that the offense will be able to spread the defense considerably. If method 2 is being used (defenders keep a certain distance between themselves, regardless of the line splits), the offensive line can get blocking angles very easily by varying the split. Therefore, the offensive lineman should split properly and constantly take advantage of the defense, regardless of how the defender has been coached.

It is the author's opinion that only the center should take the same alignment every time. The other linemen must have almost complete freedom in the alignment they assume, within certain guidelines of course. An offensive lineman who is determined and intelligent enough to experiment properly with the split can learn the reaction of the defender and the various positions he takes. By applying the knowledge gained, he will be able to place his opponent at a disadvantage and block him.

Guidelines for Offensive Line Splits

To aid in adjusting splits properly, the following guidelines are offered:

1. Never split to a distance where a defender can beat the blocker through the inside gap.
2. Take any spacing that will aid in carrying out his assignment.
3. If the defender is inside of the blocker's position, move in.
4. If the defender is head up or over, adjust to help the blocking assignment.

5. If the defender is outside of the blocker's position, move out.
6. With no defender in his immediate area, the blocker may adjust to aid his assignment.
7. If the play is called inside or over the blocker, get maximum splits if possible.
8. If the play is called outside of the blocker, take minimum splits.
9. When a blocker must execute a scoop block with an adjacent lineman, he should reduce his split.
10. If the play is called away from him, experiment with splitting.
11. If a pass is called, take normal splits.

STANCE

The most important factor in offensive football is the charge of the offensive line. The team that controls the vital 5-yard area on either side of the line of scrimmage usually wins the football game. The line charge depends on a good stance, which is fundamental to all good blocking movement. A great block begins with a great stance (Poff, 1981). Blocking depends on quickness, visibility, balance, and power. The offensive lineman must work to develop a stance that will permit maximum quickness, 100% visibility, perfect balance, and tremendous power.

Consistency is crucial to a good stance. It does not have to look the same as the man's next to him (length of legs in relation to torso, height, weight, and length of arms all affect each man differently), but it must be the same every time. The offensive guards, who must perform a greater variety of skills, especially need to develop a stance from which they can perform all assignments effectively without having to make adjustments, which may be picked up by the defense.

The stance begins with the placement of the feet. The feet should be spread at least as wide as the armpits, but never wider than the shoulders. The lineman should adjust the width of his stance until he has the ability to move in any direction. The feet should be perpendicular to the line of scrimmage, or with the toes pointed slightly inward. Having the toes pointed slightly inward helps keep the power locked in the hips. A common mistake with young linemen is to have the toes pointing outward, which decreases the ability to execute an explosive start. For maximum explosiveness, all of the body parts must be pointing in the same direction, thus creating a "power line." The coach can tell a "duck-footed" player to rotate his heels outward, which will bring his feet into proper alignment. Slightly overexaggerating this point to the player will help him keep his feet at least perpendicular to the line of scrimmage.

There should be some space under the heels with the weight up on the balls of the feet. The heels should never be more than 2 inches off the ground, as this puts too much weight forward, making it difficult for the lineman to pull or to set up for pass protection. Conversely, if the heels are flat on the

ground, too much weight is back, which makes explosion off the line difficult. With the heels raised between 1 to 1 1/2 inches off the ground, the player can "grab as much ground as possible," yet still be effective moving in any direction.

When determining the amount of stagger between the feet, once again it is important to consider the player's ability to move in any direction from the stance. A parallel stance is ideal as it allows the flexibility to move easily in any direction. However, a parallel stance is not practical for all linemen. The coach must allow for individual physical differences between players. When assuming a stance, whichever hand is the down hand, the foot on the same side becomes the stagger or "back foot." The toe of the "back foot" is even with the instep of the "up foot," or at most, even with the heel. A stagger of more than a heel-toe relationship is discouraged.

A detail in the stance that is often overlooked is the position of the ankle. Once the width and stagger of the feet has been established, the ankles should be locked and stay locked. Many linemen have "loose ankles" in which the ankle seems locked but, when one pushes off, the ankles bend first then lock again to push. This seems like a minor point but, if the ankles are not locked, the lineman is slower off the ball. Granted, this is only a fraction of a second, but football is a game of inches and seconds, and no detail is too small. When the ankle is locked, no power is lost and the power from pushing off the foot goes straight up the leg. Once the feet have been positioned, the stagger established, and the ankles are locked, the feet should remain planted until the ball is snapped.

The knees stay in and over the ankle and are in line with the feet and hips to allow for maximum power from the legs. Power-producing angles are created by the bend in the ankle and knee, therefore, we want a "Z at the knee."

The down hand is dropped slightly inside the corresponding shoulder directly below the corresponding eye, and the weight should be slightly forward. The fingers form a five-point bridge. The player should try to get as much height as possible out of the stance by putting the fingertips and not the knuckles on the ground. Visibility is enhanced by getting extra height from the stance, in addition to providing

a more flexible surface from which to push off when pulling or setting to pass protect.

The positioning of the off hand, like that of the ankle, is sometimes overlooked. Often times, players will drape their forearm across the thigh or rest it on the knee, forming a slight fist with the hand. The most efficient position is to have the forearm lightly squeezing the thigh with the hand gently grasping the back of the calf or cupped along side the knee in a position where it can come straight out at take off.

A front and side view of the stance are pictured below.



The shoulders should be parallel to the ground and to the line of scrimmage. A common fault in the positioning of the shoulders is that a lineman will sometimes have the shoulder of the down hand closer to the ground than that of the off hand (Photo A). A simple coaching point is to have the player drop the off hand to the ground as if to assume a four-point stance (Photo B). The shoulders will now be square. Next, have the player pick up the down hand and, without moving the shoulders, place it in position alongside the thigh (Photo C). It should be noted that this should only be done in practice, as placing the down hand on the ground and picking it up in a game could result in a penalty.

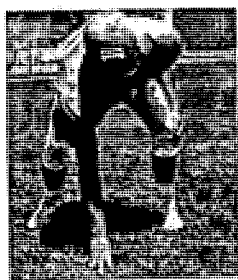


Photo A

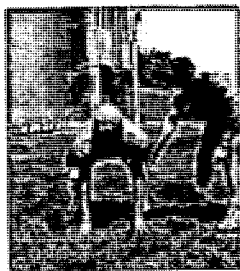


Photo B



Photo C

The back should be parallel to the ground or slightly sloped forward with the tail higher than the head and shoulders. The back must be flat — if there is a bow in the back or if the player is “humpbacked” some power may be lost outside the body line.

The head is cocked back slightly, with little or no strain in the neck, in position to create a good bull neck. A good coaching point is to tell the player to imagine that his head is “cast in cement,” anticipating contact. While the head is up so he can see, the player should not raise his head up so far that it causes his tail to drop. Rather, he should be told to think of “looking through your eyebrows.”

A common error that the coach should watch for is the lineman who drops his head at the start. Not only is this wasted motion, but it causes him to lose sight of the defender momentarily. Although this may seem picky, it is the small details that win close games. Once again, tell the player to imagine his head is “cast in cement.”

The reason for the body position of the lineman in his stance is to help make his body like a projectile to be fired from a gun. The force at the start begins at the feet and continues up through the body, terminating with the fists or shoulder. Incorrect body position causes a portion of the power to end up going in directions that do not aid the block. A good stance and start will eliminate wasted motion and the resulting loss of power.

The main power source comes from the quadricep muscles of the legs. The contraction supplies the power needed to drive the lineman out of his stance and into the block. The actual power line starts at the balls of the feet and continues in a straight line through the trunk.

Start

In moving from a stationary stance to the contact position, the movement must be a rapid coordinated effort of the arms, legs, and body. As stated previously, the line charge is perhaps the most important aspect of offensive football. A good line charge requires concentration on the snap count followed by an explosive effort off the line of scrimmage together.

Weight Shift

Before discussing the mechanics of the start in detail, it is important to explain the importance of the weight shift in the stance. A slight shifting of the weight from one foot to another is permitted to facilitate a quick start in a particular direction. However, this slight weight shift should not be detectable by a defender. Players should be taught to think in terms of "mentally shifting their weight" in the stance.

The following is based on a right-handed stance:

1. When going straight ahead and using a left lead, the weight should be on the down hand and back foot (right). Push off with the fingers of the down hand and back foot.
2. When going straight ahead and using a right lead, the weight should be on the down hand and the up foot (left). Put little or no weight on the right foot. Push off with the fingers of the down hand and the left foot.
3. When moving to the left, the weight should be on the opposite foot (right) and the down hand. Put little or no weight on the up foot (left). Push off with the down hand and the back foot.
4. When moving to the right, the weight should be on the opposite foot, in this case the left, and the fingers of the down hand. Put little or no weight on the right foot. Push off with the fingers of the down hand and the up foot.

A good coaching point is to instruct the players to "lighten the lead foot." Again, it should be emphasized that the lineman should "mentally shift" the weight and that this slight weight shift should not be detectable by a defender.

The lineman is now poised in his stance ready to explode on the snap count. To insure a faster start, the linemen should listen for the sound *preceding* the snap count and be prepared to explode on the next sound. The linemen must move on the snap count regardless of their assignment.

The offensive linemen have the initial advantage of knowing the snap count and the direction of the play. They must take full advantage of this by coming off the ball together as a unit and not separately like the keys of a typewriter. A good line surge must attempt to move the line of scrimmage back across

the neutral zone to the defenders' side of the ball. The offensive line must strive to meet the defenders on their side of the line of scrimmage. The line should be taught to think of getting their heels across the *defensive* line of scrimmage.

The start could best be described as the approach path from the stance to the contact position. To initiate a block, the lineman must get his head and shoulders moving as rapidly as possible. To accomplish this, he must move his feet. Like a sprinter coming out of the blocks, the lineman is trying to create a force with most of the starting power coming from the uncoiling hips. The first movement must be forward and not up, and the player must "hit out" with the snap count. All actions of the lineman's body must be in the direction in which he is going.

A general rule of movement is to step with the back foot when charging straight ahead and to step with the near foot when moving to the right or left. A helpful coaching point when teaching the first step is to instruct the player to "pick up the foot and point it at the defender." If the defender is shaded to the left, "pick and point" with the left foot. With the defender shaded to the right, "pick and point" with the right foot. When the defender is in a head up alignment, the lineman may step with either foot, however, as it was pointed out earlier, it is preferable to step with the staggered or back foot.

The first step should be a short balance step. A short step prevents overstriding, which is a common problem, and enables the player to be in a better balanced position to make a directional change. The first step should be quick, pick up the foot and put it down as quickly as possible, don't let it hang in the air. Keep in mind that the first step must gain ground, so it does no good to pick up the foot and put it down in the same spot. The first step should be no farther forward than the imaginary spot where the down hand was placed while in the stance. By using this landmark, the lineman will maintain a good base and not over or understride. It is important to emphasize that the first step should gain ground and should never be a position step at 90 degrees. A good defender who "reads the hat" well will destroy the blocker's efforts before he takes his second step.

A length of pipe can be used to teach linemen how to take the proper first step. Align the players

along the pipe, with their toes touching the pipe. On command, players execute the first step and hold so the coach can check their technique. Also note how the knees of the drive leg are pointed toward the ground (Photos A and B). The pipe can also be used in teaching a reach step (Photos C and D).

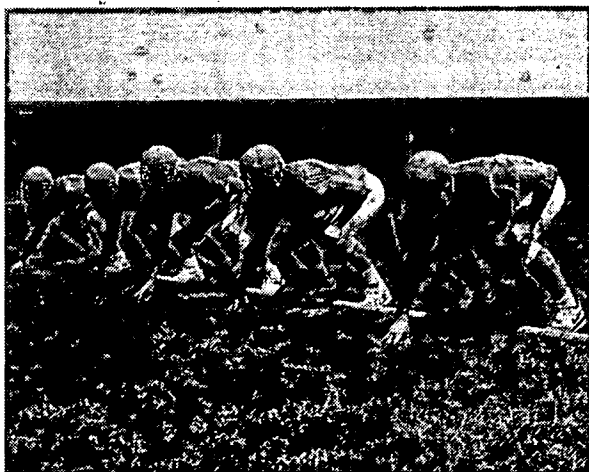


Photo A

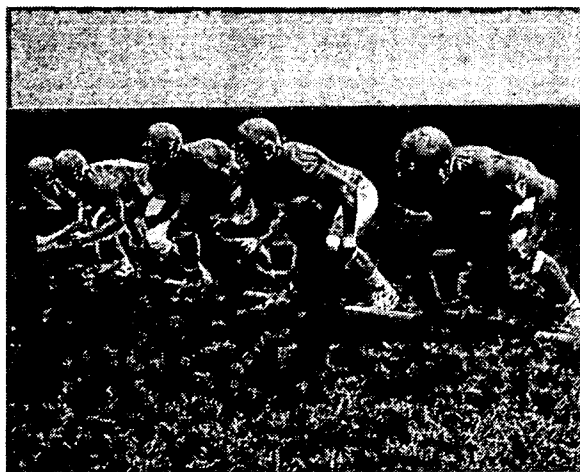


Photo B

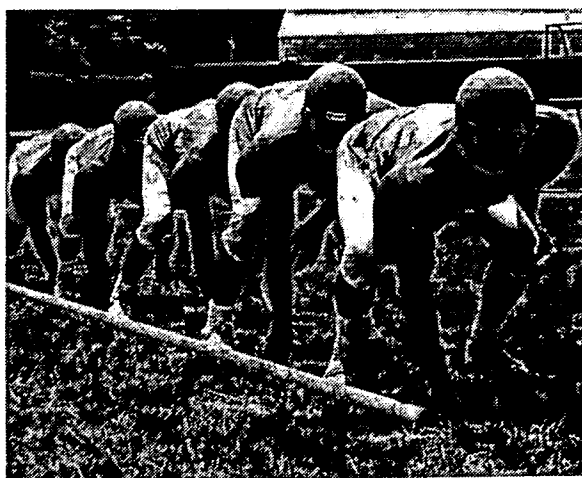


Photo C

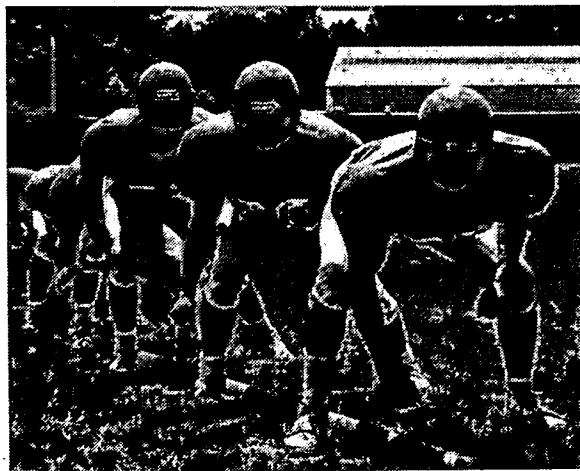


Photo D

The knee of the drive leg must be driven towards the ground simultaneously with the first forward thrust of the explosive charge and it should roll over the toe of the up foot. The knee of the up foot should point towards the ground. The "roll-off" side knee supplies the power while the lead foot is in the air. The player must concentrate on driving the knees low to the ground to maintain the power-produc-

ing angles. The knees should precede the ankles and only the balls of the feet should contact the ground, not the heels. The driving action will bring the player out and not up and help keep the body parallel to the ground (Photo A).

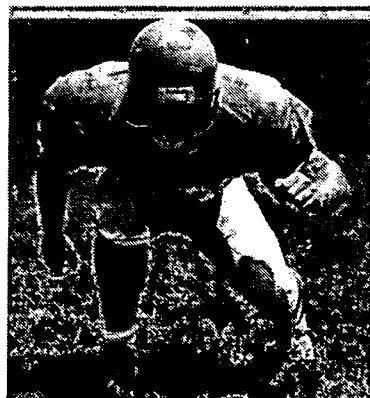


Photo A

The arm action pumps like that of a sprinter coming out of the blocks with the initial steps. The down hand moves at the same time as the lead foot with the elbow pointing straight up in the air. At the same time, the off arm is ripped rapidly forward with the fist pointing at the sky. It is easier to rip the off arm forward if the off hand grasps the calf in the stance. Pumping the arms is essential to getting maximum explosion off the ball. As a coaching point, teach the player to "shoot the hands hard off the ground" and start them lifting.

To keep the shoulder pad level down and to prevent the lineman from rising up too soon, stress bringing the down arm straight back dragging the down hand along the ground as if to snap a punt during the start, and do not pick it up. The shoulder level will stay lower longer and allows one to strike a much lower target. A simple drill is to have players grasp dirt or grass and throw it behind them during the start.

After the first step, get the other foot on the ground immediately to be balanced and squared up with the defender. The second step should be in line with the blocking angle and is also an adjustment step where the lineman adjusts to any slant or angle by the defender. Contact should be made on or about the

second step and the original trail leg should now be up under the shoulder.

In summary for a right foot lead:

1. Mentally shift all the weight to the ball of the left foot (power foot) and at the same time, "lighten" the lead foot.
2. While exploding off the left foot, drive the left knee towards the ground and lead with the right foot.
3. The lead foot becomes the power foot once it contacts the ground.
4. The power foot should replace the down hand.
5. The ball of the foot should contact the ground, not the heel.
6. The knee must precede the ankle and be driven low to maintain proper power-producing angles.
7. The toes should point straight downfield.
8. Step to get knee to knee with the defender gaining ground upfield.
9. The numbers should be over the knees, "drive the knees to the chest."
10. The weight of the shoulders should be over the ball of the power foot.
11. The head is cast in cement, the eyes are on the target.
12. After the first step, get the other foot on the ground immediately to be balanced and squared up to the defender.
13. Use short driving steps, maintain a wide base, and don't leave the legs behind.

In conclusion, it is not enough to tell players to line up and come off the ball hard. Spend the time to teach them how to line up and come off the ball.

Center Stance Quarterback Exchange

The center-quarterback exchange, or the snap, is the starting point for every offensive play, run or pass. It is a skill that is taken for granted when there is no obvious execution problem. A focus usually results only when there is a bad snap or a series of failures. The snap must be a fail-safe technique. The

exchange must be so secure that there will be no miscue (Axman, 1979).

The center's stance is similar to that of a guard or tackle with some small variations that will now be discussed in addition to reviewing the elements of a good stance.

1. The feet are spread moderately, slightly wider than that of a guard and tackle, but not so wide that it will hinder his ability to move in any direction. The feet are parallel with the toes and heels even in a boxed stance (a stagger is discouraged).

2. Both heels are slightly off the ground and the weight is on the balls of the feet.

3. The knees are in over the ankles in line with the toes.

4. Power-producing angles are created by the bend in the ankle and knee joints. There should be a "Z at the knee."

5. The tail and hips are slightly higher than the shoulders so the quarterback can operate from a high, comfortable stance. While the center's tail is slightly higher than the shoulders, it should not be raised so high as to cause him to lose the power line. The quarterback must adjust to the center, not the reverse.

6. The shoulders are parallel to the ground and to the line of scrimmage.

7. The head is up so he can see, but not so high as to force the tail down. The neck is "bulled" with the head "cast in cement." He is "looking through his eyebrows," focusing straight ahead, yet is still able to see the entire area with his peripheral vision. The center should not tip off his intentions with his head or eyes.

8. The right arm is extended to the ball with a slight break in the elbow. The right hand is on the forward right side of the ball, with the fingers spread moderately grasping the ball. The right thumb is across the forward tip of the ball.

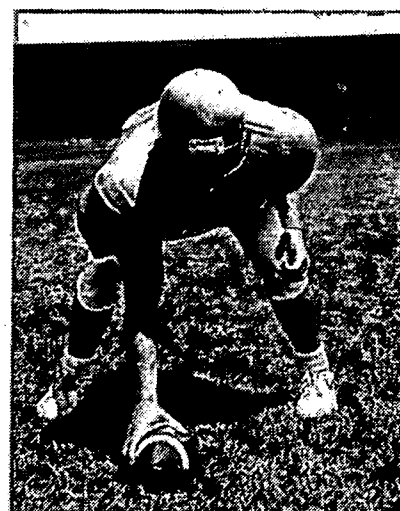
9. There are several ways to position the left hand in the stance:

(a) The left arm extends to the ball with the left hand on the lower left side of the ball. The fingers are spread moderately grasping the ball with the left thumb across the rear tip of

the lacing.

(b) The left hand is on the ground alongside the ball, using a fingertip bridge.

(c) The left forearm is lightly squeezing the thigh with the hand gently grasping the back of the calf or cupped alongside the knee in a position where it can come straight out at the take off. A front and side view of the center's stance are pictured below.



The Snap

While it is not the purpose of this training manual to discuss backfield technique, a short description of the hand placement and ride of the quarterback is needed to fully understand the complete snap. The quarterback's right hand (left hand if he is left-handed) should be wrist-deep in the center's crotch. The top hand presses the middle finger tightly up the seam of the center's pant. The quarterback's left hand should rest along the left leg of the center with the thumbs of the right and left hand touching each other. The two hands form a "V." The bottom hand helps to press the top hand up into the seam of the center's pants. The center should be able to feel the pressure of the quarterback's hand. The quarterback's elbows and knees should be slightly bent and his feet should be just inside the center's feet. As a coaching point, the center can be instructed to "sit" on the quarterback's hands as if sitting on a bicycle seat.

The center should be taught to lift the ball into the quarterback's right hand as hard as he can in an

attempt to break the "V" in the quarterback's hands. This is where the quarterback's hand pressure becomes important. By applying constant pressure, the quarterback provides the center with a landmark to aim at. The center must be able to feel the hand he is slapping the ball into. The quarterback must concentrate on giving the center a fixed target. It is important to emphasize to the center that he must lift the ball straight off the ground and not loop the ball like the swing of a pendulum into the quarterback's hands. The center can be taught to think of "pumping" the ball in a straight line in an attempt to drive the ball beyond the point of the quarterback's hands. If the center is lifting properly, his right elbow will be sticking out at the bend in the hip after the snap. As the center pumps the ball to the quarterback, he will turn his wrist a quarter turn to the left to deliver the ball to the quarterback with the laces up. This quarter turn of the ball will happen naturally as the center brings the ball up (Photo A and B).



Photo A



Photo B

It is of paramount importance that the center snap and step in one quick movement. A common error is to snap and then step. The defender can move as the ball is being snapped, thus overpowering the center, who has not initiated his change. The center must be coached to take his first step as the ball is leaving the ground. It is helpful to teach the center to concentrate on lifting the ball and charging over it rather than snapping it back to the quarterback.

The center must step in the direction he is to block. The first step is the most important in speed off the

ball. The longer the step, the more time the foot will be in the air and the slower the step will be. The lead foot should be picked up and put down as fast as possible (this is where quick feet come in) and as soon as it is down, the second foot comes through. While the lead foot is moving, the major force and explosion will be coming from the pushing of the trail leg. As the center executes his technique, the quarterback must be riding with him with his hands and arms. The quarterback's hands must become an extension of the center's rear end. If the quarterback fails to ride and pulls out too quickly, the ball will hit him on the fingertips and a fumble may result. The center must be sure that he does not lift his tail up as he snaps the ball. He should be moving forward, keeping his back and tail level. He must avoid lifting upward. The quicker the center, the more important the ride becomes.

Another common error among centers is to drop their head as they snap the ball. This can cause the center to lose sight of the defender for an instant, which can lead to the defender defeating the block of the center. By telling the center to think of his head as being "cast in cement," this problem can be eliminated.

To summarize, some of the check points to look for in the stance, start, and snap of the offensive center areas follows:

1. Proper base, armpit to shoulder width
2. Correct ball placement, inside right leg, 36 inches out front
3. 90-degree bend in legs
4. Tail higher than head
5. Lift and step at the same time
6. Quick first step
7. Quarterback ride

Repetition is important when teaching the center's technique. The quarterback and center should take at least 25 snaps before each practice. Each time a snap is taken, the center should fire out at least 5 yards, working on his first step.

DRIVE BLOCK

Once the stance and start are mastered, the next crucial aspect of offensive line play is the block itself. Determined, intelligent, and aggressive blocking is an indispensable quality of a good football team, from both a technical and psychological standpoint. It is almost impossible for a team to have great morale, confidence, and enthusiasm when it lacks the ability to sustain a good ground attack or to protect the passer.

When executing a drive block, it is essential that the blocker hit the defender as hard as possible without lunging. It is a question of timing and coordination as well as striking a compromise between firing out so hard that he loses his balance and having such control that there is little impact. "The explosion of the blow is what makes a good block, explosiveness in a short distance. You have to have enough drive to stymie the defensive man, and then it becomes balance and control" (Allen, 1975, p. 92). If the blocker's charge is too explosive and exceeds his ability to control his body, he is overextended, which makes it easy for the defender to get off the block.

A general blocking principle is that a blocker should never sacrifice the delivery of a blow for the sake of thinking about technique. Hit the opponent, do not "finesse" him. Next to a missed assignment, the worst mistake is to block "nobody." A blocker's techniques have to become a habit along with quickness and explosion off the line of scrimmage. The blocker must meet his opponent on the defender's side of the line. The explosion of the block should be delivered up and through the man.

As we discuss one-on-one blocking technique, we will begin with the drive block, also referred to as the base block. The drive block is the basis of all one-on-one blocks and is the initial learning phase of all blocks that will follow. The drive block is used when the blocker is at the point of attack. The offensive lineman will option block the defender taking him whichever way he wants to go. The main idea is to stay on the block so the back can "run to daylight" rather than to a predetermined hole. For the sake of simplicity, we will describe the technique of an offensive lineman in a right-handed stance, with the defender in a head-up or "nose-to-nose" alignment.

There are three phases to a successful one-on-one block. The first phase is the approach, which is the path from the stance to the contact position. The second phase is the contact, which is the driving blow delivered up and through the defensive man. The third and final phase is the follow through. In this phase, the blocker maintains contact with the defensive man and "finishes off" the block.

The Approach

We will begin our discussion with the approach phase. The reader will find that much of the material contained in the approach was already covered with the examination of the start. The author feels that it is important to review the key elements of the start as it relates to the approach. We will not, however, cover them in such minute detail as we did earlier with the start.

As the blocker is in his stance waiting for the ball to be snapped, his total concentration must be on the aiming point and the starting count. To review, the aiming point for a defensive lineman is under his chin and on the bottom of the numbers for a linebacker. By aiming at the chin of a defensive lineman, the blocker will wind up hitting the numbers as the defender rises to meet the charge of the blocker. Remember the purpose of the aiming point: If the blocker hits the aiming point, he will automatically be lower than the defender. The proper hit will put the blocker in a good position to climb the defender. The blocker must use his eyes as an aiming device to tell the player to "look the target in."

The blocker must explode off the line of scrimmage into the point of aim with the snap count. A lead step should be taken with the back foot, it should replace the down hand, and the player should get it on the ground quickly. The up knee should be driven to the ground and it must "roll over the up foot." The knees should continue to be driven low to keep the proper power-producing angles. The initial movement must be forward and not up; instruct the blocker to "hit out, not up." The back must be as parallel to the ground as possible. If the blocker is too high, the defender will destroy the blocker's power line with a blow under the shoulder pads. The blocker must be careful not to overstride, he must bring his feet up under him and be ready to make contact on the rise. Good, short, balanced steps will allow the blocker to anticipate the defender's movement and adjust to his charge. His short yet rapid steps should

always be gaining ground upfield. The blocker must never take a lateral or position step.

Contact Phase

Vicious contact is necessary to neutralize the defender's charge and force him to retreat from the area he is instructed to protect. As the blocker uses his eyes to sight the target, he must be taught to "explode the eyes" at the moment of contact. This point is used to emphasize to the blocker that he cannot block what he cannot see. By blinking the eyes at contact, the blocker can lose sight of the defender for just an instant, which can give the defender enough time to defeat the block. The blocker should be taught to think of "running his eyes through the aiming point" and to "block through the man, not to the man."

Again it is important to emphasize the speed of the blocker to the contact point. The blocker must have the strength and ability to go through the block protection (hand or forearm shiver). The faster he gets there, the less time the defender has to react, consequently, the less the force of the blow delivered by the defender. The blocker must know he will be hit as he drives through the resistance into the point of aim.

As the blocker explodes into the point of aim, he must whip the arms and fists into the block. Teach the blocker to "get the hands inside" before the defender can develop block protection. The blocker must keep his elbows and hands inside the framework of his body for maximum power. As the fists snap into the numbers, the blocker must "rip up" and feel his hips snap as they roll up over the legs to complete the power angle. Upon impact, the blocker widens his base slightly, with his feet wider than his shoulders. The hitting power comes from whipping the arms and the extension of the knees and hips.

Follow Through Phase

Good follow through requires great technique and foot movement and above all great second effort. The blocker must follow through once contact is made. Vince Lombardi said, "The main reason for blocking failure is a lack of follow through, the lack of continuation of the block. The blocker's charge must be a continuous drive sustained by the piston action of the legs" (Townsend, 1973, p. 72). The blocker cannot hit, hesitate, and then try to get movement again. The blocker must fight to keep his feet

moving in a piston-like action. The block does not start until contact is made so the blocker must never stop his feet. Quick feet are essential to finalizing the block, and moving the feet is a matter of concentration.

The blocker must have control of his body so that he is lifting up and through the defender, trying to pick the defender up off the ground in order to get him off balance. The blocker should feel the strain in his upper body in attempting to keep his forearms away from his body in a lifting action. He should rotate the hands through the defender's numbers and "bench press him," working for a lockout.

The blocker must keep a wide base and "sprint" the defender upfield with short powerful steps. To illustrate the meaning of short powerful steps, tell the player to imagine that he is "running the 100-yard dash with 6-inch steps." Emphasize to the player that, although he is taking short steps, they must be powerful, driving steps, and he must "pound the ground to gain ground."

As he begins to drive the defender, the blocker must roll over the lead knee to a point where it almost touches the ground. The trail leg is driven forward slightly ahead of the lead leg, and it now becomes the lead leg and so on. The blocker must strive to stay over the lead knee when maintaining a low pad level and a flat back. The blocker should concentrate on "trying to touch his chin to his knee."

The goal of the drive block is to get movement off the line of scrimmage, then direction. Direction is not so important because the back can run off the block in any direction. The blocker must maintain contact and allow the back to "run to daylight." The blocker must have his head up and "bite the defender on the numbers," driving the defender in any direction he wishes to go. The blocker must think of "working low to high." Once the blocker gets movement, he starts to lift or "climb" the defender. However, the blocker must not try to finish the block until he gets movement. Again, it must be emphasized that movement is the most important thing, not direction but movement.

After the blocker gets good initial movement, he must finish the block. The blocker must tuck his tail up underneath him, "suck your butt in," and bring his legs up underneath his body. To avoid overextension, tell the blocker that "the feet must travel with the hips." The blocker should "try to step

on the defender's toes" as he rises up and accelerates. The blocker must "finish him to the sky," as he stands up to run over the defender.

Against Linebackers

The blocker must take the proper angle in relation to the play. A common error is to take a path to where the linebacker is rather than to where he will be. This is when it is important to know where the play is going, for instance, on a wide play, the blocker would take a shallow angle to the defender. On an inside play, the guard would take a more direct approach to the linebacker.

The key points for the blocker to concentrate on as he approaches the linebacker are to stay "low and square." The blocker must stay low by trying to touch his chin to his knee. He must be low to get under the linebacker's pads. It is important for the blocker to "gather" his legs before he "rips up" so that he will be on balance. He must recoil his hips before he strikes. The blocker must dip down just before contact to keep the hips coiled so he can unleash the power in his hips as he would on a drive block of a defensive lineman. "Dip with the legs, don't bend at the waist."

Common Mistakes

Probably the single major fault in the execution of the drive block is a lack of follow through. Often there is good initial contact, but the blocker fails to follow through with short powerful steps. Linemen are so intent on delivering an explosive blow that sometimes they do not bring their feet with them and they fall flat on their face.

Another problem is taking too long a first step. If the first step is too long, the defender could be making contact with the blocker before he has the second step down. If he is unable to get this foot down fast enough, he will be making contact off-balance.

Overextension is another common reason for blocking failure. More blocks are lost by being too low (overextended) than by being too high. The main cause of overextension is failure to roll the hips up over the legs. This then leaves the buttocks behind the power line and causes the blocker to lean into the block or fall flat on his face as the defender moves. A good coaching technique to give the blocker the feel of

rolling his hips is to grab him by the tail and shoulder pads and run him through the contact. The coach positions the blocker in a "fit" position on a defender. Standing to the side of the blocker, the coach grabs the blocker's shoulder pads at the base of the neck with one hand, and by the belt with the other hand (Photo A). As the blocker accelerates his feet, the coach pulls up on the shoulder pads with one hand and pushes down on the blocker's hips with the other hand (Photo B). This is an excellent teaching technique to illustrate rolling the hips and "climbing" the defender.



Photo A



Photo B

On occasion, an offensive lineman will lose a block because he is too high. A blocker should not rise up too quickly, because he will then become a "chest blocker" and lose leverage, causing the block to fail. If the blocker finds himself working too high after contact, achieving only a stalemate, he must "dip" down and "get another bite."

Before we move on to the teaching progression for the drive block, let's sum up the technique of the drive block:

1. You must be in a good stance. Without that, it is impossible to fire out.
2. Drive off the up foot and step with the back foot. Roll over the up knee, driving it almost to the ground. The angle and foot of take-off may change depending on the alignment of the defender.

3. Use short powerful steps so as not to become overextended.
4. Do not narrow the base. As the defender is driven back, keep the feet as wide as the shoulders.

Try to keep the toes in, heels out.

5. Point of aim is the chin on a down lineman, the bottom of the numbers on a linebacker. Keep the head up and the eyes open.
6. The back must remain flat or arched at all times. Never have a humpback.
7. As contact is made, whip the arms from the hips with an explosive thrust into the numbers. Jar the defender off balance and off the ball. This will bring the hips underneath.
8. Keep the arms and fists in blocking position throughout the contact and follow through.
9. Take the man off the line of scrimmage the way he wants to go. The backs will cut off the block.
10. Sustain — don't stop until the whistle blows.
11. Fight the stalemate; "dip down and get another bite."
12. The second step is extremely important. Without it the blocker can become overextended. The blocker must bring the back foot with him and not stop on contact.
13. The blocker must be lower than the defensive man to get proper leverage, regardless of his position.
14. The blocker must explode through the man. He should aim mentally for a spot beyond the defender.
15. If the block is executed on a linebacker, the arm whip and hip extension is delayed until the blocker is close enough to "step on his toes."

Drive Block Teaching Progression

General Information

1. Always start with two men working together.
2. Teach the five phases in reverse order (fit, follow through, contact, hit and drive, and second effort).

3. Show each player the ideal block and what it feels like.
4. All teaching is done on boards and chutes.
5. The starting count is used to start all drills and the whistle stops all drills.

Teaching the Drive Block

I. Fit Position (First Phase)

Purpose: To show the blocker the ideal blocking position, utilizing proper power-producing angles.

- A. Put the defender in a challenge position and have the offensive blocker fit into him.
- B. Offensive blocker — fit position
 1. Feet parallel: toes in, heels out
 2. Good bend in knees: create power-producing angle
 3. Knees in over the ankles
 4. Butt down, back arched
 5. Good bullneck: "head cast in cement"
 6. Eyes in the solar plexus of the defender
 7. Arms in a blocking position, meat of the hands at the bottom of the defender's breast plate
- C. Defender — challenging position



The Fit Position

1. Feet slightly staggered
2. Good knee bend
3. Hold blocker under the arms
4. Give resistance

II. Follow Through (Second Phase)

Purpose: To have the player experience an ideal block. To teach the proper use of leverage, the hip roll, the acceleration of the feet, and the maintenance of a block.

- A. The offensive blocker will align with three-quarters of his body underneath the chute in a fit position.
- B. The defender will be in a challenge position holding the blocker in place.
- C. Walking down the board: The purpose is to teach the blocker to understand the use of leverage and where his power comes from.
 1. The blocker will walk the defender down the board with a bulled neck, power-producing angle and feeling pressure at the small of his back.
 2. The defender must give steady resistance.



Photo A

3. Coaching Points:

- (a) The blocker will only be able to move the defender if he has the proper low leverage position on the defender.

- (b) He must feel how the proper angle of the knee and ankle joints create the power to move the defender.
- (c) He must understand that his blocking surfaces are his fists and facemask.
- (d) He must have a bullneck and "head cast in cement."
- (e) He must feel his head, arms, and feet working together to move the defender.

D. Running down the board: The purpose is to teach the blocker to understand the use of leverage and where his power comes from at full speed (Photo A).

1. The blocker will run the defender down the board.
2. The defender must give steady resistance.
3. Coaching Points: (same as previous drill — walking down the board)



Photo A

E. Hip roll: The purpose is to teach the blocker to roll his hips and accelerate when he feels the defender attempting to get off the block. When executing a block, the player will make contact and have a stalemate. In order to get movement, the blocker must roll his hips and accelerate his feet to dominate the defender.

1. The defender will give as much resistance as possible.
2. The blocker will drive the defender down the board. When the blocker feels the defender

begin to slip, he will roll his hips and accelerate his feet, finishing the block.

F. Hold

1. Halfway down the board, on the command "hold," the blocker will stop.
2. The coach will check the position of the blocker.
3. Coaching Points:
 - (a) Hip roll is the underneath action, the snapping of the knees straight out and the shooting of the hips through in trying to "marry the defender."
 - (b) The blocker seeks power-producing angles in the ankle and knee joints to get the lifting action.
 - (c) The short powerful steps are explained as running the 100-yard dash with 6-inch steps.
 - (d) The feet should be underneath the shoulder pads to guard against overextension — "stay over the lead knee."
 - (e) A good base, feet shoulder width apart (one on each side of the board). This is necessary to stay on the block. If the feet are together, the blocker will fall off the defender.

III. Contact (Third Phase)

Purpose: To teach the contact phase of the drive block and to stress the arm whip and fist delivering a blow.

A. Two-step Pop (Fire to the Fit)

1. Offensive blocker should position himself two steps from the defender.
2. The defensive man will assume a challenge position.
3. The defender should be in a good two-point stance, bending his knees as much as possible with his chest out and his head up.
4. The defender will catch the blocker rather than deliver a blow.
5. The blocker takes only two steps, jolting the defender backwards.

6. Concentrate on whipping the arms into the block and delivering a punch in the bottom of the defender's numbers with short powerful steps (Photo A and B).



Photo A |



Photo B |

7. Coaching Points:

- (a) Make contact with the fists at the bottom of the breast plate (Photo C).
- (b) Eyes follow to the solar plexus — “bite the defender on the numbers.”
- (c) The blocking surface is the fists and the facemask; keep the elbows and hands within the framework of the body.



Photo C |

(d) Step with the right foot and balance step with the left, end with the feet parallel. The toes should be pointing directly downfield.

(e) If the feet are not parallel after contact, the blocker will not have the proper power-producing angles in the knee joints to move the defender.

IV. Approach (Fourth Phase)

Purpose: To put all aspects of the drive block together. To teach the approach, contact, and follow through (Photo A and B).

A. The blocker is aligned under the chute in a three-point stance a foot away from the defender.

B. To start, the defender will be in a two-point stance and, as the drill progresses he will move to a three-point stance.

C. The offensive blocker will explode out of his stance and drive the defender down the board.

D. The defender will make a good collision, then allow the blocker to drive him down the board, giving ground slowly.

E. As the drill progresses, vary the distance between the blocker and the defender to aid in the development of a rhythm of blocking a defender at varied distances away.



Photo A



Photo B

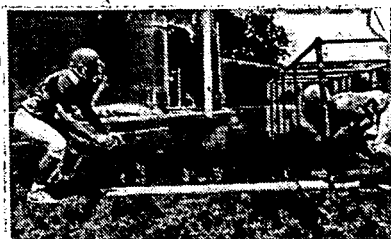
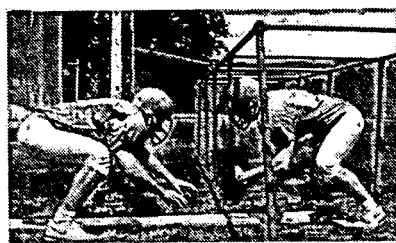
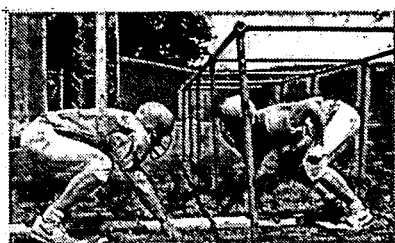
F. Coaching Points:

1. All aspects of the drive block are executed. The full progression is pictured below.

(a) Approach

(b) Contact

(c) Follow-through



2. The blocker should explode out of the stance, trying to create great force.

3. Upon making contact with the defender, the blocker must whip the arms, roll the hips and accelerate the feet.

4. Drive the defender down the board with good second and third effort.

V. Second Effort (Fifth Phase)

Purpose: To teach the blocker to maintain contact when the defender is spinning out or disengaging the blocker.

A. The coach will give the defender a direction to spin or weave.

B. When the defender reaches the end of the board, he will spin out of the block.

C. The blocker must step with the near foot in the direction of the spin, aggressively attacking the defender (Photo A).

D. Never cross the feet or kick the heels together. The blocker must maintain a good base (Photo B).

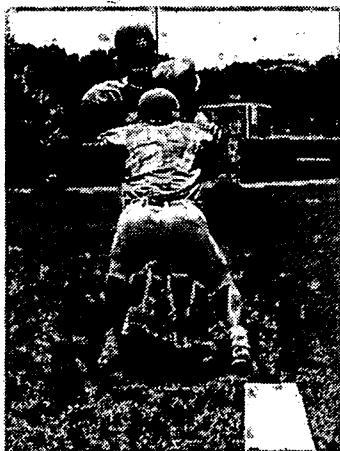


Photo A



Photo B

VI. The Punch Progression

Purpose: The punch progression is used to refine the "punch" phase of the drive block. It is used in conjunction with the drive block progression to further isolate each phase of the block.

- A. The blocker will assume a 6-point stance in front of the defender, who will hold a shield angled slightly toward the blocker (Photo A).
- B. The blocker will "rip up" with his fists into the shield (Photo B).
- C. After several repetitions, the blocker will "rip up" with his fists, "sink the hips," and wind up in a layout position (Photo C).



Photo A



Photo B

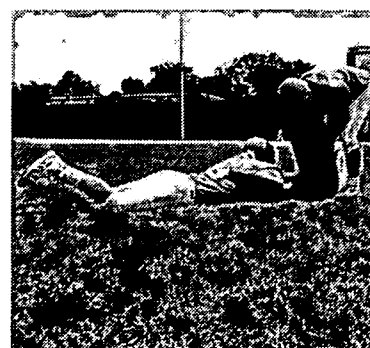


Photo C

INDIVIDUAL BLOCKING TECHNIQUES

Now that we have covered the drive block in great detail, we will move on to other individual blocking techniques. It is essential that the lineman master the drive block because that is the basis of all other blocks, both individual and combination, that are to be taught.

The old football adage, "Football is a game of blocking and tackling" is true, but neither blocking nor tackling alone makes up good football. The innovations of modern football have led to the development of a variety of individual blocking techniques. It is no longer enough to rely simply on size and strength to dominate a defender. A defender who is smaller and quicker may still be able to outplay a larger, stronger offensive lineman if he plays his position with finesse and technique. Modern defensive players do not stand flat-footed, waiting to challenge a blocker in a man-for-man battle. Rather, they employ a variety of tactics including stunts, slants, and loops. If offensive linemen are to keep pace with their defensive counterparts, they too must develop a variety of blocking techniques. Once these techniques are mastered, they may be employed by the blocker at his discretion or as the situation dictates. In this way, the defender is not only in doubt as to the point of attack, the starting count, or who will block him, but also how he will be blocked.

As we begin to discuss the different blocks, it should be pointed out that different offensive systems use different terminology to describe the same technique. As each block is discussed, the most commonly used name or names will be listed. No matter what you call the block, the main objective is always the same: The blocker must get his body between the defensive man and the football and keep it there.

Cutoff Block

Purpose: A backside block used to stop lateral pursuit of the defender to the play by getting the body between the defender and the ball. The basic principle of the technique is to never honor a slant away from the point of attack. If the defender runs around behind the block, he should not have a chance at the ball carrier.

Down Lineman

Point of Aim: Four inches above the playside knee.

1. Explode off the outside foot taking a short jab step with the near foot. The angle of the step will be determined by the alignment of the defender.
2. Immediately follow with the back foot and get it planted on the ground.
3. With the second step, explode with the backside shoulder and arm, ripping the arm and shoulder through the landmark. This technique will place the blocker between the defender and the attack point.
4. Once proper contact is made, scramble on all fours.
5. If the blocker feels pressure by the defender trying to fight across his face, he should continue to work on all fours, squeezing back against him fighting to get his shoulders square to the line of scrimmage (Photo A).



Photo A

Coaching Point: When using the scramble block technique, stay off the knees. Only the hands and feet should be in contact with the ground, and the head is up.

6. If the defender loops away and the blocker feels no body pressure by the defender, continue to scramble upfield immediately at a 45-degree angle to linebacker depth.
 - (a) Be prepared for a scrape off linebacker.

- (b) Chop the defender down by using the same technique as was used on the defensive lineman.
- (c) If there is no scrape linebacker, the blocker should get up and sprint to the point of attack, flattening his path until he gets to the running lane (Diagram A).

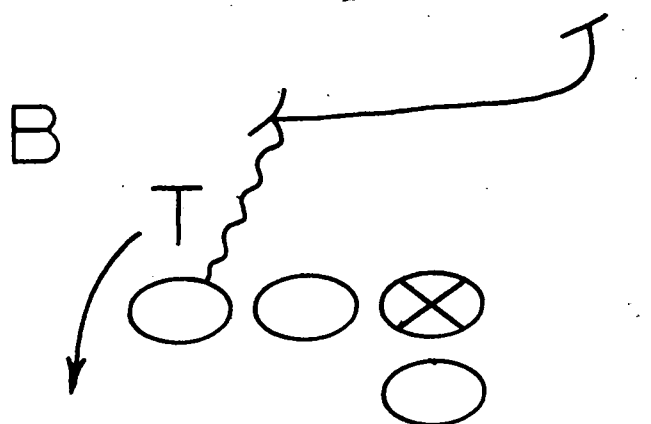


Diagram A

Cutoff Block Versus a Linebacker

Point of Aim: Four inches above the playside knee.

1. If the blocker is showing blitz, the lineman must anticipate that the backer will be on him immediately and react quickly.
2. The blocker will use the same technique as he did on the down lineman, except he will drive off the line of scrimmage at an angle, which will allow him to intercept the backer as he reacts to the play.

Coaching Points:

- (a) Keep head up at all times.
- (b) Be close enough to "step on his toes" before exploding into the block.

When the blocker must cut off a down lineman aligned to his inside, he will employ a variation of the cutoff block called a *lunge cutoff*.

Point of Aim: Four inches above the defender's playside knee

1. While pivoting on the playside foot, cross over with the outside foot and shoot both hands past the defender hip high.

2. The blocker should actually be off balance as he lunges inside ("lunge and shoot").
3. When the hands hit the ground, cut the defender with the hip.

Coaching Points:

- (a) Stay off the knees.
- (b) Keep the head up.
- (c) Scramble upfield to get square to the line of scrimmage.

There are two keys to the proper execution of the lunge cutoff:

1. Overextending on the first step to elongate the entire body, thereby increasing the blocking surface.
2. Total commitment by the blocker to get his head and shoulders past the defender.

The Reach Block

Purpose: This is an aggressive block to the outside where the blocker is trying to gain outside position on a defensive lineman while knocking him off the line of scrimmage (Photo A, B, and C).

Point of Aim: Tight to the defender's outside number.

1. The direction of the lead step, taken with the outside foot, is dictated by the alignment of the defender.
 - (a) The wider the defender, the flatter the step.
 - (b) The tighter the defender, the tighter the step.
2. The lead step should be a shorter step than the one used on the drive block. The blocker must get the foot on the ground quicker in case he has to push off to the inside to adjust to a pinch or slant move by the defender.
3. Gain ground on the second step, splitting the crotch of the defender.
4. Rip the backside hand, forearm, shoulder and eye through the defender's outside number.

Coaching Point: "Get the inside half of your body on the outside half of his body."

5. Drive off the second step.

6. Keep the elbows and hands inside the framework of the body.
7. Fight to maintain outside leverage on the defender.
8. Keep the feet moving in a piston-like fashion.
9. Snap the body, arch the back, and climb the defender.
10. Bench press the defender, applying pressure with the inside hand, control him with the outside hand. Work for a lockout.
11. Step on the defender's toes, work the defender downfield.



Photo A



Photo B

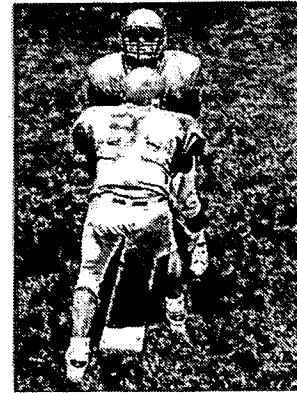


Photo C

Coaching Points:

- (a) Once contact is made and outside leverage is established, work to drive the defender straight upfield, never allowing the shoulders to be turned to the sideline.
- (b) The blocker must never allow the defender to beat him across his face to the outside by a looping defender.
- (c) Speed off the ball is the most important factor, otherwise the blocker will have a difficult time executing the block if the defender reacts quickly to the outside.

The Rip Block

Purpose: This block is used when an offensive lineman must fight through pressure on the line of scrimmage to block a defender off the line of scrimmage. It is used primarily on trap plays by the lineman over the defensive lineman to be trapped.

Point of Aim: Through the inside number of the defender on the line of scrimmage to the playside number of the defender off the line of scrimmage.

1. Step with the inside foot. The tighter the alignment of the defensive lineman, the flatter the step. The blocker must try to avoid becoming engaged with the defender.
2. Rip the outside fist, forearm and shoulder through the inside number of the defender. Get the eyes inside to locate the blocker.
3. Do not rise up, rip through the defender, not up.
4. Drive off the second step. Keep the feet moving.
5. The blocker must not allow the defender to squeeze him to the inside or knock him off his path.
6. Once the blocker is past the defensive lineman, he should execute a running drive block on the linebacker. Clear him out of the hole.

The Rip and Roll Block

Purpose: This block is used on the trap when the defensive lineman squeezes inside with the blocker. The blocker locks on and drives the defender down inside, the trapper then "rolls through the hole" looking for the blocker.

Point of Aim: Through the inside number of the defender on the line of scrimmage to the playside number of the defender off the line of scrimmage.

1. Step with the inside foot, the tighter the alignment of the defensive lineman, the flatter the step. The blocker must try to keep from becoming engaged with the defender, just as he did with the rip.
2. Rip the outside fist, forearm and shoulder through the inside number of the defender. Get the eyes inside to locate the backer.
3. Do not rise up, rip through the defender, not up.
4. Drive off the second step. If the defender squeezes the blocker to the inside, the blocker should rip up with his outside elbow, drive his head across the front of the defender and execute a reverse shoulder block on the defender, driving him down inside. The blocker must not allow penetration.

5. The blocker should snap the hips, arch his back and climb the defender, keeping his head in the hole.

6. If the defender tries to play through the blocker, he should turn his body 180 degrees, "ground the hands," and snap his hips into the defender. Continue to scramble on all fours to keep the defender out of the hole.

The Near Shoulder Block

Purpose: This is a variation of the drive block when the blocker is removed from his blocking responsibility with outside position on the frontside. The near shoulder block is designed to move the defender down the line of scrimmage and away from the immediate point of attack (blocking down on a defensive lineman). It is not useful in preventing a defender from penetrating through the line of scrimmage. It is called the near shoulder block because the blocker will use the shoulder nearest the defender to make initial contact. If the defender is on the blocker's left, he will make contact with the left shoulder, and vice versa.

Point of Aim: The near hip if the defender is covering part of his teammate or if he is a reader. If the man is in the gap, aim for the near number.

1. Step directly toward the defender with the foot nearest the defender.
2. Execute the same fundamentals as the drive block, except the blocker will slide the block to his chest. The goal is to get a sealing effect rather than creating great movement to the inside. The blocker must be on balance.
3. The blocker must take the defender back and in on an angle, driving him into the pile.
4. The blocker's head should be on the defender's upfield hip or shoulder. This will help to keep the defender from sliding to the outside or rolling out of the block.

Coaching Point: Keep the head between the defender and the hole.

The Far or Cross Shoulder Block

Purpose: The same as the near shoulder, except the far shoulder block is better for stopping a penetrating

defender than the near shoulder block. The advantage of the far shoulder block is that it forces the blocker's body across and in front of the defender. This action prevents the defender from penetrating across the line of scrimmage and destroying the backfield action. The far shoulder is defined as the shoulder that is farthest away from the defender to be blocked. A defender who is aligned to the blocker's left would be attacked with the blocker's right shoulder and vice versa.

Point of Aim: The far hip of the defender regardless of his alignment.

1. Dropstep with the foot nearest the defender; the foot should be parallel to the line of scrimmage. This step will put the blocker in a position to cut off a hard charging defensive lineman. If the blocker were to take his first step toward the defender's original line-up position rather than to a point where he can cut off the defender's charge, he would be in an awkward position to adjust to the penetration. On the other hand, if the blocker's step is parallel, he can cut off penetration. If the defender does not penetrate, the blocker is still in good position to adjust upfield with his second step and execute the block. It is important to note that even though the far shoulder is being used as the blocking surface, the first step must still be taken with the foot nearest the defender.

2. The blocker drives his head across the front of the defender and makes contact with his far shoulder, forearm, and fist.

3. If the defender tries to slide or roll out to the outside, the blocker will "ground his hands" in front of the defender and whip his hips 180 degrees upfield, staying off his knees, so that his body is perpendicular to the line of scrimmage with his head facing the offensive backfield.

The Down, Gap Step, or Fill Block

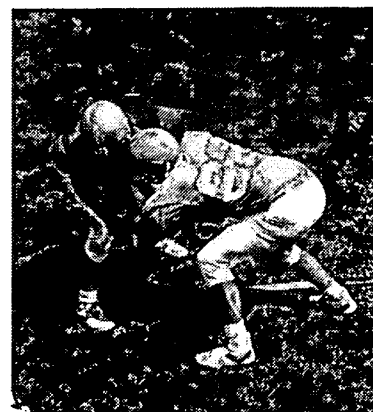
Purpose: This is a block used by a blocker when he has outside or playside position by alignment on a defender. It is used to block an area from which a man is pulling. Example: a center blocking back on a trap, or the blocker who is blocking a defensive lineman who is lined up on the blocker adjacent to him when executing a fold or cross block. Depending upon the stance and the reaction of the defender, the blocker will adjust his block.

Point of Aim: The midline of the defender is the initial aiming point. The blocker will "read on the run," and if the defender reads, the aiming point becomes the midline to the back of the near shoulder pad. If the defender penetrates, the aiming point becomes the front of the near shoulder pad to armpit area.

1. Prior to the initial step, the blocker must try to anticipate the defender's move.
 - (a) If the defender is crowding the ball and his weight is tipped forward, he is probably a penetrator.
 - (b) If the defender is off the ball or if his weight is tipped back, he is probably a reader.
2. Take a short step with the near foot at the near hand of the defender, get it on the ground quickly. It is imperative not to overstride on the first step. It should be no more than six inches. Keep the back flat and stay low.
3. Transfer the weight to the lead step while pivoting on the far foot so the toe is pointing at the defender and the body is turned. The second step will now be able to squeeze up the base.
4. Keep the playside foot on the ground until it is determined how the defender is playing. The defender should declare himself before the blocker takes his second step.
5. If the defender penetrates, pivot to the inside with both feet. The near hand punches the chest while the far hand punches the rib cage or the front of the near shoulder pad. The blocker must keep his elbows and hands within the framework of his body.
6. At this point, the blocker can drive his head in front of the defender and slide the block to his far shoulder, executing a far shoulder block.
7. If the blocker begins to lose leverage, he can "ground his hands" in front of the defender and scramble block him on all fours.
8. If the defender slides to the outside or begins to roll out of the block, the blocker whips his hips upfield, staying off his knees so that his body is perpendicular to the line of scrimmage with his head facing the offensive backfield.
9. If the defender reads, use the same footwork.

10. The near hand punches the rib cage, while the far hand punches the near shoulder pad.
11. The blocker will now slide the block to his chest rather than go for a lockout. It is more important to keep the defender sealed off from the play than to create a great movement to the inside.
12. The blocker must fight to stay on balance and concentrate on keeping his feet moving in a piston-like fashion.

The first series of photographs demonstrates the correct technique.



Series 1

The second series of photographs demonstrates incorrect technique. The blocker's first step is toward the defender's line up position, rather than in a direction to stop penetration by the defender. As a result, the defender penetrates the line of scrimmage.



Series 2

COMBINATION BLOCKING

Combination blocking is a term used to describe the effective blocking of more than one lineman; executed at the point of attack. Combination blocks are often used to get better blocking angles on the defenders at the point of attack. These blocks can also be used to cut off a fast moving linebacker or to confuse defensive keys. While each man involved in the block is performing some variation of the one-on-one techniques described earlier, the success of the play is dependent upon the combined actions of all the blockers involved. Combination blocks offer various methods to cope with a variety of defenses for the same play. This allows a team to run a set number of plays with maximum efficiency versus most defenses by simply changing the blocking combinations to be used. In addition, combination blocks can be used to overcome personnel or tactical deficiencies faced by an offensive team. Below is a list of how combination blocks may serve an offensive system (Metrokotsas, 1987, p. 89):

1. To add power at the point of attack as in short yardage or goal-line situations.
2. To get more blockers to the point of attack than there are defenders (as in a sweep or option).
3. To aid in adjusting the blocking to variations in defensive sets (in the case of multiple defensive teams).
4. To help one blocker who may be weaker than his defensive opponent in a one-on-one situation.
5. To help overcome the power and skill of one or more particular defenders.

Regardless of how combinations of blocks are used, the basic fundamentals are still the same as those for one-on-one techniques. The result is one-on-one blocking with adjacent linemen switching responsibilities or working in close coordination with one another.

The Double -Team Block or Post and Drive Block

Purpose: To give blocking strength at the point of attack. The double team is the strongest of all offensive blocks because two blockers are employed versus one defender. When executed properly, the double-team block will not only bury the defender and create a cavity in the defense, but will also cut off the pursuit by the other defenders. This is accomplished by the blockers driving the defender back

perpendicular to the line of scrimmage, forcing the other defenders to go around the double-team block at a much deeper pursuit angle.

The two blockers involved in the double-team are referred to separately as the post blocker and the drive blocker. The post man is the blocker who has the defender aligned on him and the drive man is the blocker nearest the point of attack.

Point of Aim for Post Blocker: Post blocker's point of aim is the numbers of the defender.

1. Step with the near foot on approach, get "knee to knee."
2. Drive down the middle of the defender using all the elements of a good drive block.
3. The first responsibility of the post blocker is to stop the defender's charge. He must block as if he is going to take the defender alone.
 4. The blocker must maintain a flat back and a wide base.
 5. As the post man feels the drive man make contact, he must stay squared up to the defender and work his hips toward the drive man.
 6. Drive the man straight back and keep the seam closed.
 7. Exceptions:
 - (a) If the defender angles inside, the post man must adjust and block him alone.
 - (b) If the defender angles out, the post man will become the drive man, executing his technique.
 - (c) If the defender is in the gap, the blocker will aim for the near number of the defender and step to get "knee to crotch" with the defender. He will then work to get "hip to hip" with the drive man. The drive man will also aim for the defender's near number and step to get "knee to crotch" with the defender. He will then work his hips toward the drive man.

Coaching Points for a Gap Defender:

1. Both blockers must step "knee to crotch" enabling both to be square.
2. Both blockers must "grab a number" and work "hip to hip" to seal the defender.

Point of Aim for Drive Blocker: Point of aim is the near hip of the defender.

1. Step with the near foot directly towards the hips of the defender. This will begin to seal the seam between the post man and himself.
2. Look the near hip of the defender in.
3. Drive the near hand into the near hip of the defender.
4. Drive the near forearm up under the defender in a lifting motion. "Hit low and rip up."
5. The head is up and slides to the upfield portion of the hip as the drive man slides the block to his chest. He must not "bury the head," "keep the eyes to the sky."
6. Step straight upfield with the outside foot and work the hips toward the post man.
7. Get movement using short, piston-like steps to drive the defender back.
8. Maintain pressure, do not allow the defender to split the double team.

The double team is pictured below.

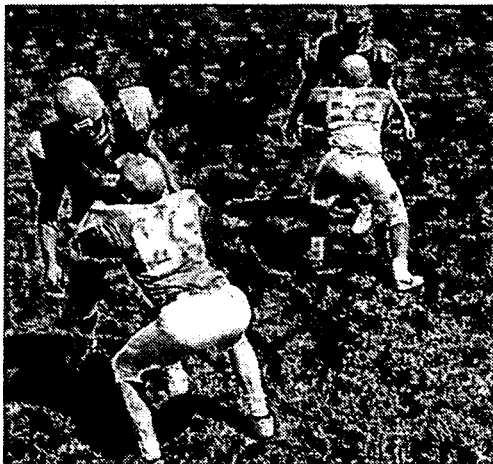


9. Exceptions:

- (a) Defender angles in, disappearing to the inside; pick up the linebacker scraping toward the play with a drive block, "look to the next level." (Photo A)

Coaching Point: as the drive man blocks down he must keep his head up and never get his shoulders turned perpendicular to the line of scrimmage. In this way, if the defender disappears to the inside, he has not overcommitted himself to the double team and can still work

upfield to pick up a linebacker. Photo B demonstrates a blocker who has buried his head and turned his shoulders so that he cannot come off for the linebacker.



| Photo A |

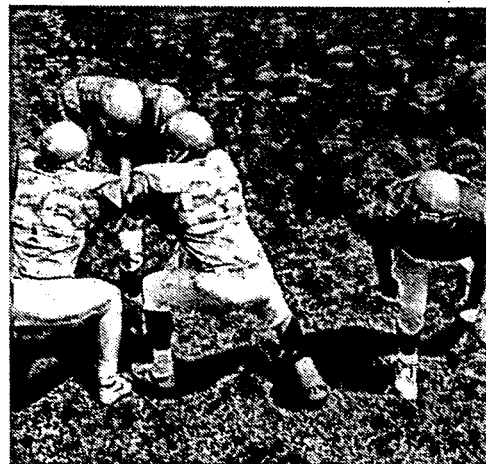


Photo B

(b) If the defender angles out toward the drive man, he will become the post man and execute his techniques.

(c) If the defender is in the gap, the drive man will aim for the near number of the defender and step to get "knee to crotch" with the defender. He will then work his hip toward the post man to close the seam.

General Coaching Point: The blockers should not think of closing the seam by swinging their hips toward one another on contact. This could cause them to change their forward momentum to lateral movement, resulting in a stalemate at the line of scrimmage, thereby giving the pursuit an easy angle to the ball carrier, or worse yet, allowing the defender to split the double team. Remember, the object of the double team is to get movement upfield perpendicular to the line of scrimmage to cut off pursuit. Emphasize to the blockers that they should sustain the block by driving up through the defender and work their hips together as they power the defender upfield with short, piston-like steps.

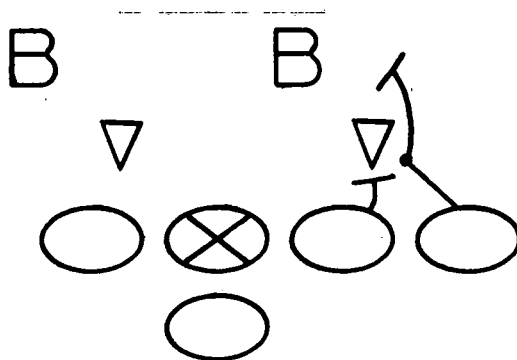
The Bump, Chip, or Co-op Block

Purpose: The block is used to block a defensive lineman and linebacker when the defensive lineman has

outside leverage by alignment on the inside blocker or when a fold scheme is impractical. The block will enable the offense to bring a lineman down to block a linebacker, eliminate any quick lateral movement by the defensive lineman and effectively seal all frontside gaps against penetration. The inside blocker is responsible for stopping penetration and sealing a frontside gap. The outside blocker is responsible for pinning the defensive lineman to the inside so the inside blocker can take over the block, then releasing to the linebacker. The block is especially effective against stacked defenders and angles off stacks.

Point of Aim for Inside Blocker: Point of aim is the outside number of the down lineman.

1. Step with the outside foot, drive through the outside number of the down lineman.
2. The inside blocker must get the initial movement on the down lineman and maintain contact until the whistle blows. He must block the defender as if he were receiving no help.
3. He must gain outside leverage on the defender, "cover his outside number with your inside number."
4. As he gains outside leverage on the defender, he must work his hips toward the outside blocker, bumping him off to the linebacker.



The Bump Block

Point of Aim for Outside Blocker: Point of aim is the near hip of the down lineman.

1. Step up and in to close the distance between himself and the inside blocker.
 - (a) Keep the near foot perpendicular to the line of scrimmage and do not turn the shoulders so he can explode straight upfield.

2. He is responsible for not allowing the defender to get lateral movement or to split the seam gaining penetration upfield.

3. On the second step, make contact with a strong slam, driving the near forearm and shoulder through any part of the defender that shows, ripping up under the defender's pads.

(a) This jolt should stop the defender's momentum long enough to help the inside blocker gain control.

(b) As he rips through the defender, he must keep his head out of the block and his feet under him.

(c) He must keep an eye on the linebacker to the inside and be aware of his second responsibility, "eyeball the linebacker."

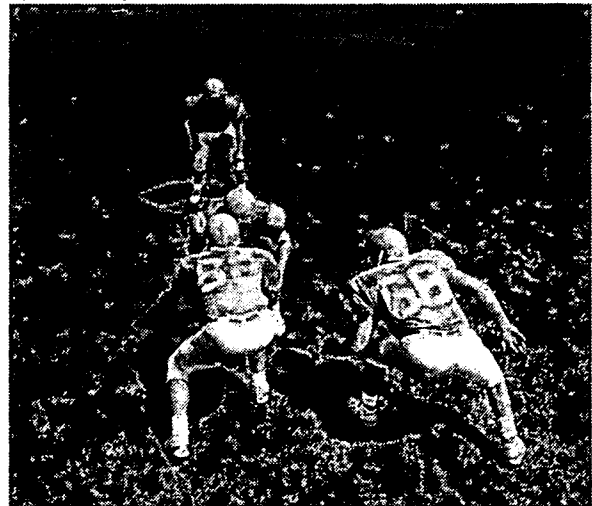
4. After he has ripped through the down lineman, he must continue to his next area of responsibility.

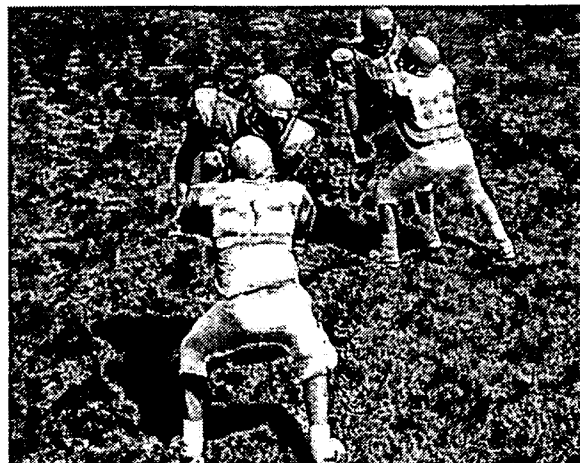
5. He must keep his shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage as he approaches the linebacker.

6. He will execute a drive block on the linebacker, aiming for the outside number of the linebacker.

(a) Work to gain outside leverage on the linebacker, "cover his outside number with your inside number."

The series of photographs demonstrates the correct techniques for the bump block.





Coaching Point: It is important for the outside blocker to keep his shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage and his head out of the block on the down lineman so that he does not overcommit himself and allow the linebacker to pursue and make the play (Photo A).

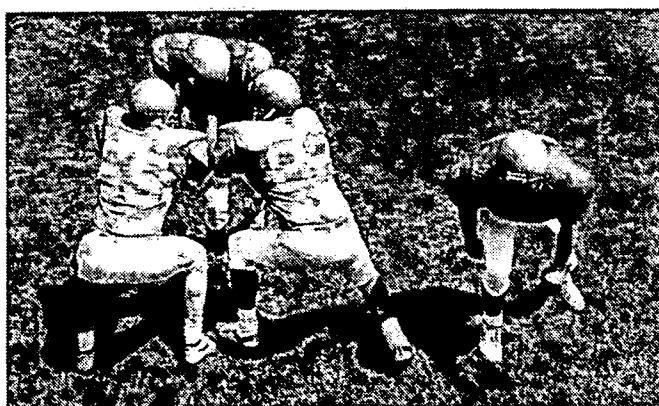


Photo A

The Fold Block

Purpose: To enable a lineman to block a linebacker when he cannot get to him directly or to create blocking angles. The fold is used to block a combination of a defensive lineman and a flowing linebacker. The fold can be used by any two offensive linemen with the exception of the center. It is not a good idea to involve the center in any pulling because it may cause difficulty with the snap. The only time the center can fold block is if he is the man executing the down block on the defensive lineman. The center

can be the drive man but never the fold man. In the execution of the fold block, the uncovered lineman will always go first with the covered lineman folding around for the linebacker (Diagram A).

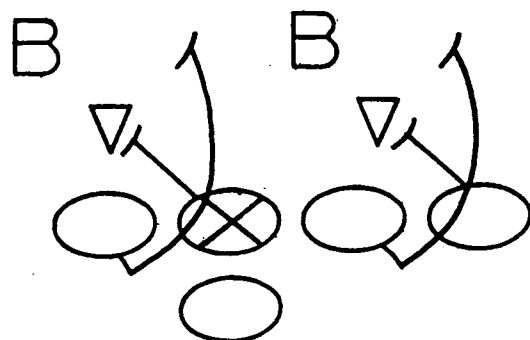


Diagram A

Point of Aim for the Man Blocking the Down Lineman: Drive man.

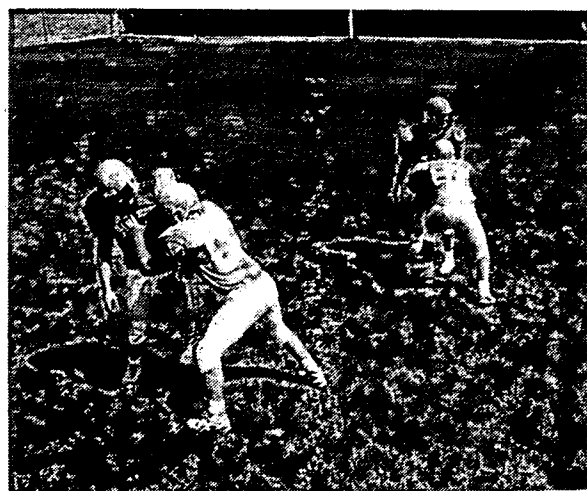
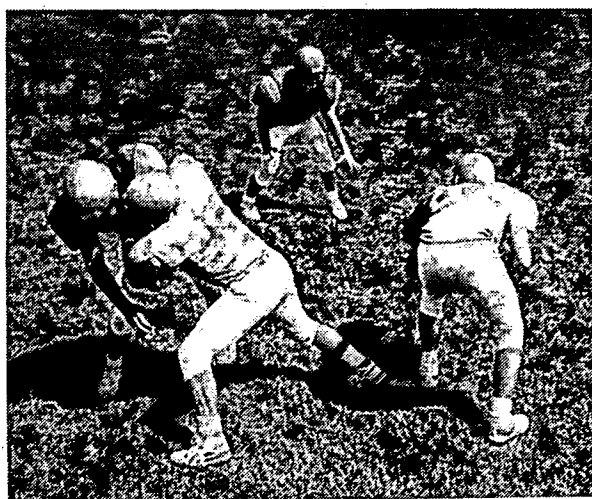
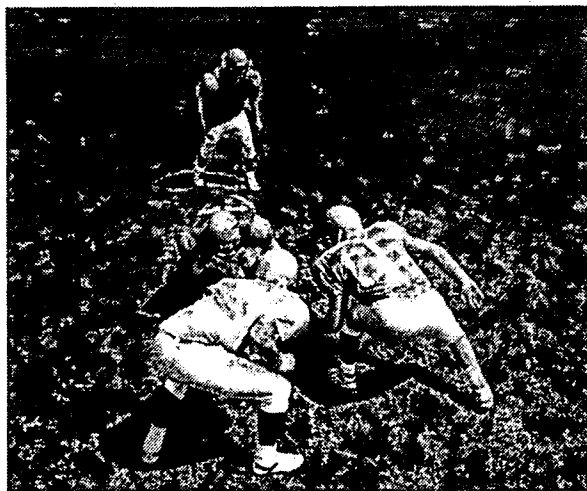
1. Execute a down block as was previously described in the individual blocking techniques section.

Point of Aim for the Man Executing the Fold: Fold man.

1. Take a dropstep to clear the block of the man executing the down block. Stay low, do not stand up.
2. Place the lead hand on the far hip of the man executing the down block. This will keep the blocker on a tight course with his shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage.
 - (a) The fold man must be aware of the possible stunt by the linebacker as he pulls himself around the drive man. He must watch that he does not get too wide on the fold. If he leaves too much space between himself and the drive man, the linebacker could beat the fold man to the inside. He must understand that linebackers are taught to scrape tight off the tail of the down lineman.
 - (b) The fold man must focus on the linebacker throughout the fold, "eyeball the linebacker."
 - (c) The fold man must be prepared to challenge the linebacker one-on-one in the hole or kick him out if he scrapes too wide.
 - (d) The fold must think of getting around the drive man first, then reacting to the linebacker.

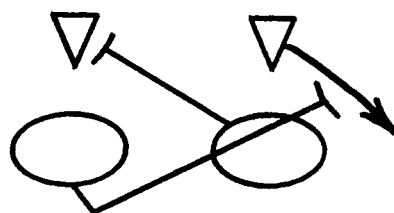
3. Attack the linebacker with a drive block. Keep a wide base on the approach and contact, drive up through the linebacker.

The series of photographs below demonstrates the fold block.



The Cross Block

Purpose: The cross block is used to confuse defensive keys and to create better blocking angles. The cross block is executed when two adjacent linemen, both covered by down defensive linemen, switch assignments. The cross block can be performed by any two adjacent linemen with the only exception being the center. The only time the center can cross block is if he goes first. The center should never be asked to execute any type of pulling maneuver because it may cause a problem with the snap. The cross block is a much quicker block than the fold block. On the cross block, the outside man should always go first and his technique will be the same as the drive man on the fold block. The blocker crossing behind the drive man will execute a short trap block (Diagram A).



DiagramA

Point of Aim for the Outside Man: The drive man.

1. Execute a down block as was previously described in the individual technique section.

Point of Aim for the Inside Man: Point of aim for the inside or crossing man is the near hip of the down lineman aligned over the outside man.

1. The first step is a dropstep to allow the outside man to clear. The lead foot should be pointing up into the line of scrimmage at a 45-degree angle.
2. As he takes his first step, the blocker should rip his near elbow towards the goal line to bring his head and shoulders around quickly.
3. The inside man must be taught to stay as low as possible as he executes the cross block. Because

the block happens so fast, if the blocker stands up, he will fail to get a good drive block on the defender. His head should be no higher than it was in his stance.

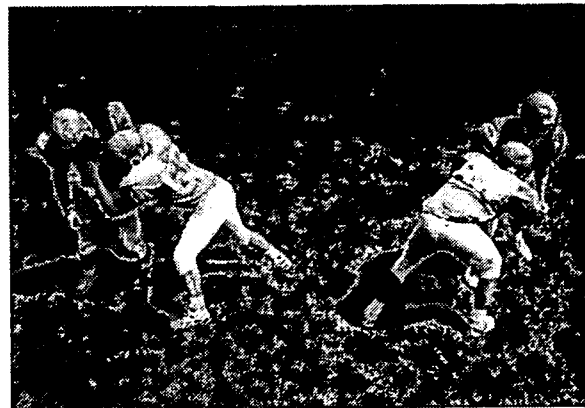
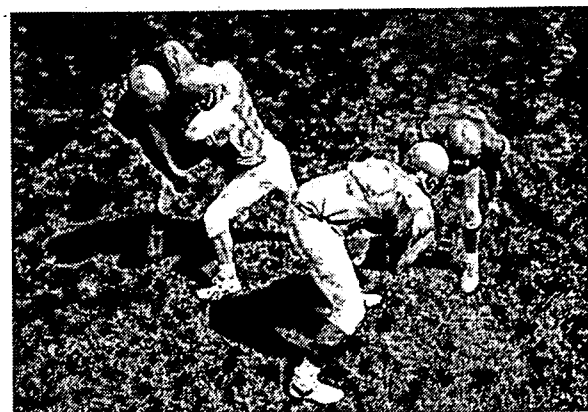
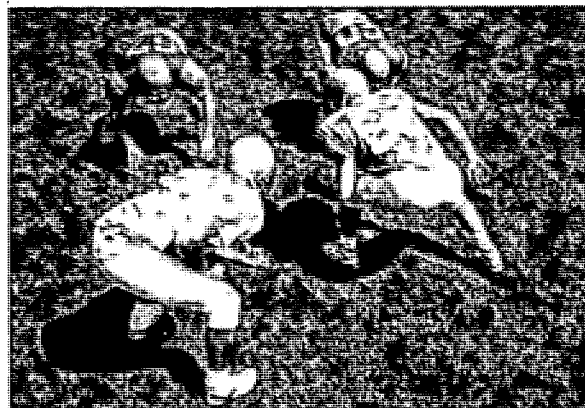
4. On the second step, the lineman will head up and into the line of scrimmage at a 45-degree angle, "climb the hill."

(a) As the blocker is taking his second step, he can put his far hand on the outside hip of the drive man and pull himself through. This technique is optional. Some linemen find this technique helpful while others find they can make the block better if they do not pull themselves through.

5. Once the inside man has cleared the drive man, he will execute a drive block on the outside man.

6. He must kick the defender out and get his feet out of the hole.

The series of photographs below demonstrates the correct technique for the cross block.



7. Exception:

- (a) If the outside defensive lineman closes or "pinches" down to the inside staying close to the outside blocker's hip, it is now impossible to kick him out. The inside blocker will now "log him in." The approach is the same but now he will execute a reach block through the defender's outside number (Diagram B).

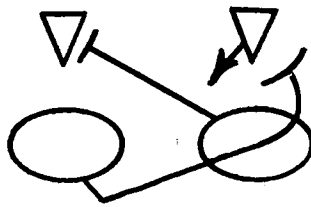


Diagram B

The Scoop Block

Purpose: This block is a combination block executed by two adjacent offensive linemen, which enables them to block their playside gap. The scoop is the best method to use in picking up angling defenses and stunts. This technique can be used on both the front and backsides of a play to discourage pursuit. The block puts two offensive linemen on two defenders, a defensive down lineman and a linebacker. The decision on which lineman blocks which defender is determined by the reaction of the defenders. Any two offensive linemen may execute the scoop block. A good example involves the center and the backside guard blocking the nose guard and the backside linebacker. Typically, the situation when a scoop may be employed is when the playside blocker is covered by a down lineman and the backside blocker is uncovered (Diagram A).

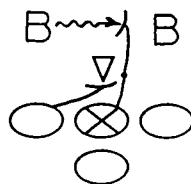


Diagram A

It is imperative that the two offensive linemen secure their playside gaps. Prior to the snap, the blocker must anticipate the worst case scenario by expecting the defender to slant or angle on every play. To prevent this, the blocker must step with the appropriate foot to protect his playside gap responsibility on every play (Diagram B and C).

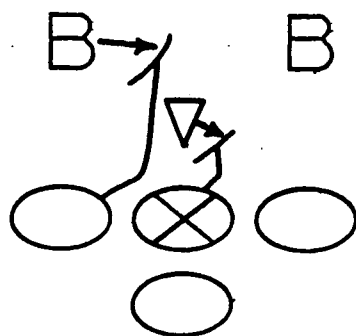


Diagram B

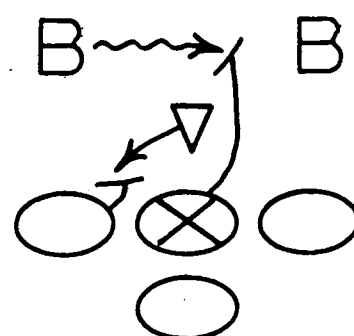


Diagram C

There are two types of scoop blocks, the regular or power scoop and the slip scoop. In the power scoop, the covered lineman will engage the defensive lineman on him and then work up to the linebacker, if the uncovered lineman can overtake his block. If the defender angles hard to the playside gap, the covered lineman will stay on the block and the uncovered man will work up to the linebacker. When executing the slip scoop, the covered man will try to avoid the defensive lineman and escape to the linebacker. The uncovered lineman will make every effort to block the defensive lineman.

The Power Scoop

Point of Aim for the Covered Lineman: The playside armpit of the down lineman.

1. The near foot steps at a 45-degree angle up and out. Teach the blocker to think of stepping "knee to gap."
2. The second step should bisect the crotch of the defender.
3. Drive through the playside armpit of the down lineman with the backside fist, forearm and shoulder.
4. Key the down lineman:

- (a) If the defender plays the block straight on, the blocker will drive him off the ball.
- (b) The blocker must keep his shoulders square and pressure the defender with the backside hand, forearm and shoulder. He will control the defender with his playside hand and forearm, pressing the defender in an attempt to turn his shoulders.
- (c) Once he feels pressure from the uncovered lineman, he will maintain contact until he sees the linebacker. He will then release to the linebacker. It is important to emphasize to the covered man that he must never slip off to the linebacker unless he feels the pressure from the uncovered man and sees the linebacker.
- (d) If the defensive lineman angles playside, the covered man will maintain contact and drive him off the ball gaining depth and width.
- (e) If the defender angles away, the blocker should hand check the defender, pushing him toward the uncovered man, then continue to the linebacker.

Coaching Point: In the power scoop, it is essential that the covered man must not avoid contact. He must get a piece of the defensive lineman to check his momentum, thereby helping the uncovered man secure his block.

Remember: The down lineman is the greatest threat to the play, so he must be secured before the linebacker can be blocked.

Point of Aim for the Uncovered Lineman: Point of aim is the belt buckle of the down lineman.

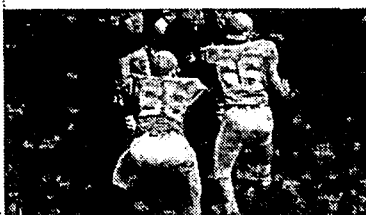
1. The uncovered man should cut down his split slightly toward the covered man.
2. Take a lateral step with the near foot, pointing the big toe at the belt buckle of the down lineman.
3. Key the reaction of the down lineman. The blocker must maintain a low pad level, staying as low as he was in his stance.

- (a) If the defender plays it straight, the blocker will continue on a course to drive through the belt buckle of the down lineman.

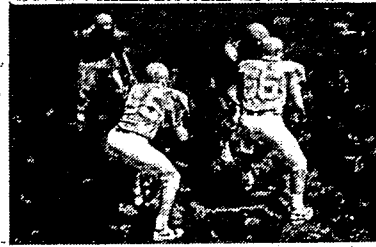
- (b) Rip the backside arm through and work to get playside position on the defender.
- (c) Knock the covered man off the linebacker.
- (d) If the down lineman angles to the covered man, he will drive block the playside hip of the down lineman and rip up through the playside number. Get movement off the ball.
- (e) If the defender angles away from him, he will continue upfield for the linebacker.

In series 1, the uncovered lineman blocks the defensive lineman.

In series 2, the uncovered lineman blocks the linebacker.



Series 1



Series 2

The Slip Scoop

Purpose: The slip scoop is a variation of the scoop block, the major difference being that the covered man will attempt to avoid the down lineman and escape to the linebacker.

Point of Aim for the Covered Man: The covered man will step to a point 8 inches beyond the playside knee of the down lineman.

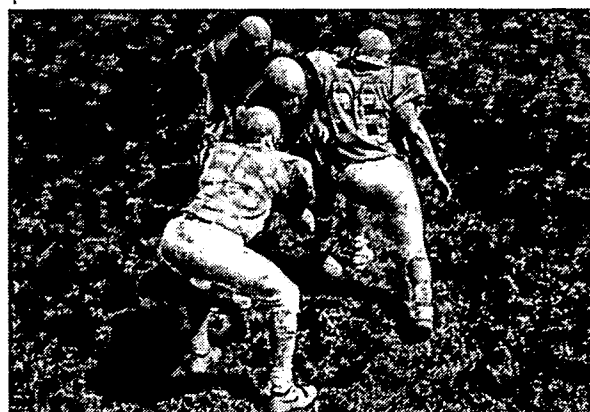
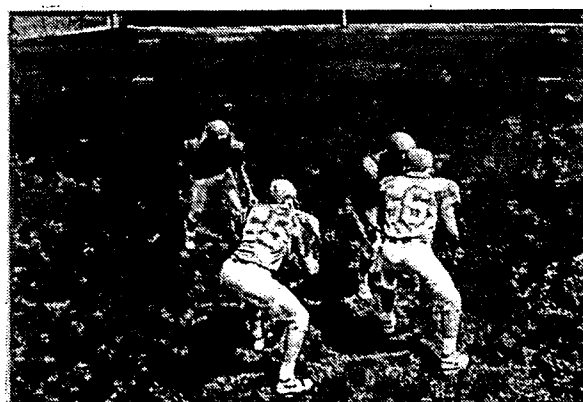
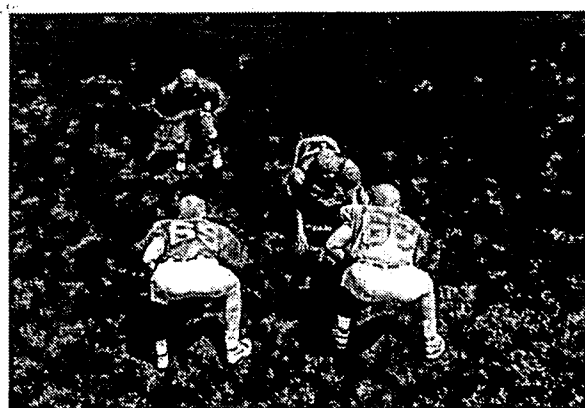
1. Step up at a 30-degree angle 8 inches beyond the playside knee of the down lineman.
2. The second step should be a crossover step.
3. Dip the backside shoulder and rip the backside forearm and shoulder through to avoid the defensive lineman and make a clean escape ("step, dip, rip").
4. The goal is to block the linebacker.
5. If the covered man feels pressure from the defender trying to cross his face, he must block him to insure the playside gap.
6. If there is no pressure, the covered man will continue to the backer and cut him or drive block the playside number.

Point of Aim for the Uncovered Lineman: Point of aim is 4 inches above the playside knee of the down defender.

1. The first step is a lateral step with the big toe pointing at the far hand of the down lineman.
2. The second step is a crossover aiming for a point 4 inches above the playside knee. The shoulders are almost parallel to the sideline.
3. Dip the backside shoulder and rip the forearm through the playside knee.
4. The blocker must get his head and shoulders past the defender's playside.
5. Once contact is made, the blocker will scramble on all fours, working the defender upfield.

6. If the defender slants across the covered man's face, the uncovered man will continue upfield for the linebacker.

The series of photographs below demonstrates the slip scoop.



The Horn Block

Purpose: The horn block is used to block a loose playing linebacker either inside or outside the block of the blocker's adjacent outside lineman. This will enable the uncovered playside lineman to block the playside linebacker after the defense has made a commitment. The horn is most commonly employed by the playside guard and tackle when facing a 50 defense. Problems develop when the linebacker is flowing too fast for the uncovered man to pick him up with a normal drive block or if the covered man is driving his man to the inside and the uncovered man gets caught up while trying to get to the linebacker. The horn block will allow the uncovered lineman to step back laterally to key the covered man's block

and then attack the linebacker accordingly (Diagram A and B).

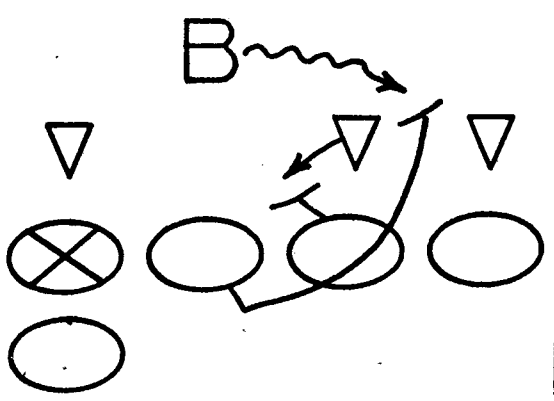


Diagram A

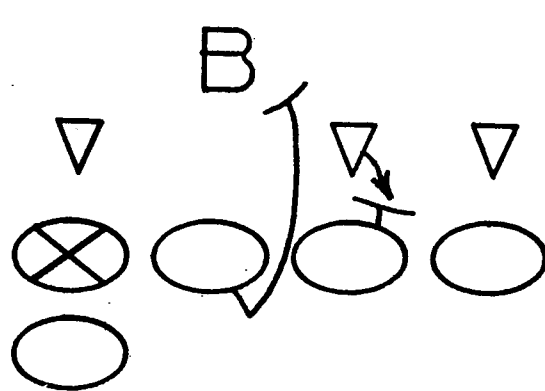


Diagram B

Point of Aim for the Covered Man: The middle of the numbers of the defensive lineman.

1. Execute the drive block on the defensive lineman; the blocker must take him wherever he goes.
2. He must create movement if the defender plays straight.
3. The blocker must change directions quickly if the defender slants.
4. He must never allow penetration.
5. Once movement has been created, the block must be sustained.

Point of Aim for the Uncovered Man: Dependent upon reaction of defender.

1. Recognize the depth of the linebacker:
 - (a) Is he coming forward on a blitz?
 - (b) Is he deep so he can react and scrape?
2. If the linebacker's alignment is tight (i.e., closer than the defensive tackle's feet), fire off on the snap and drive block the man.
3. If the linebacker is playing back, "key the knee" of the defensive lineman aligned on the covered man, using proper footwork.
4. Step laterally and back with the playside foot. Keep the shoulders as square as possible.
 - (a) When going right, step at a 5 o'clock angle.

- (b) When going left, step at a 7 o'clock angle.
5. Quickly bring the inside foot back so that it is parallel to the playside foot.
 6. "Key the knee" of the defensive lineman.
 - (a) If the knee comes toward the uncovered man:
 - (i) Push off the inside foot and step toward the far hip of the covered man with the playside foot "push toward the read."
 - (ii) Place the playside hand on the outside hip of the covered man. This will keep the uncovered man on a tight course with the shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage. Linebacker are taught to scrape tight off the tail of their defensive lineman, so it is essential that the uncovered man maintain a tight course. If the uncovered man is too wide, the linebacker can beat him through the inside gap.
 - (iii) If the linebacker is scraping wide or if a defensive end is pinching also, the blocker will go around the tight end's block (Diagram C).
 - (iv) The blocker must be ready to challenge the linebacker one-on-one if he fills or to kick him out if he scrapes too wide.

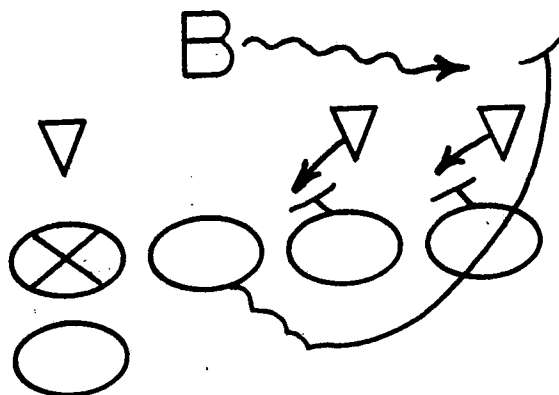
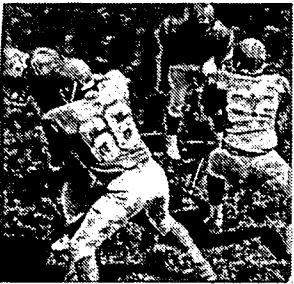
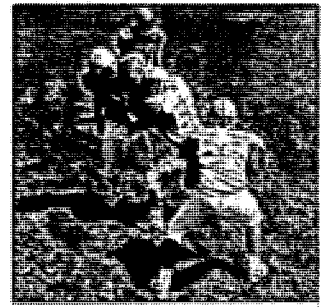
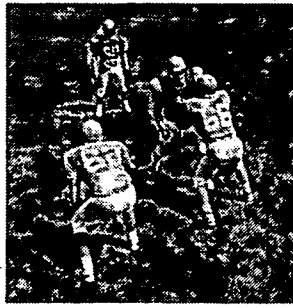
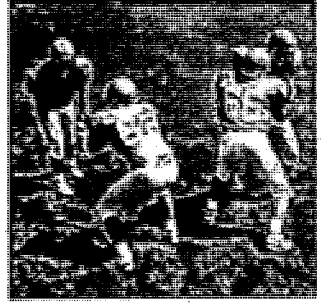
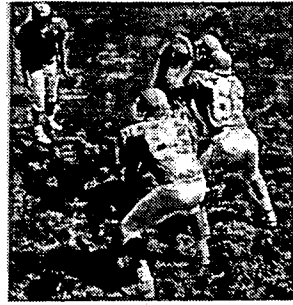


Diagram C.



Series 1: The uncovered lineman goes around the covered lineman.

(b) If the near knee of the defender does not come toward the blocker, his third step will be directly upfield. He will come up inside the down lineman and drive block the defender.



Series 2: The uncovered lineman goes inside the covered lineman

PULLING TECHNIQUES

Pulling is a common technique used in almost every type of offense. The guard is the lineman who is required to pull most frequently. On occasion, the tackle is also used to pull. The only member of the offensive line who will seldom if ever pull is the center. There are several purposes for pulling. One reason is to get more people to the point of attack. Another is to get a better blocking angle on a defender, and a third is to take advantage of an overaggressive defensive lineman with a blindside block.

There are basically four types of pulls that we will examine:

1. Flat pull
2. Pull and Lead
3. Counter Trey
4. Trap

These basic steps and arm motions will be the same for all of these blocks. The course and point of aim will be different in each case and will be covered in the sections dealing with the individual techniques.

Basic Pulling Technique

1. Shift the weight back slightly, but not enough to tip the intentions to the defense.
2. Mentally shift most of the weight to the foot opposite the direction of the pull. "Dig in" with the big toe.
3. Keep the head up and the eyes focusing straight ahead. The blocker should not be looking in the direction he is going to pull until the ball is snapped (Photo A).
4. On the snap count, pivot on the ball of the backside foot and drive off the same leg.
5. As the blocker is driving off the back leg, he will take a short directional step at the same time with the lead foot to open his hips (Photo B).
6. Rip the elbow of the lead arm back beyond the hip at the same time that the lead step is being taken.
7. Thrust the backside fist out in front of the body in the direction of the pull.

(a) The action of the lead and backside arm will get the shoulders turned as rapidly as possible in the direction of the pull.

8. Whip the eyes and head in the direction of the pull.

9. The blocker will only be able to run once he gets his shoulders over his knees. Instruct the player to "slide the chest over the lead knee." (Photo C)

10. The player must run in a low position which will enable him to be in a position to hit at all times.

11. The cardinal rule when pulling is to never allow an unblocked defender to cross the face of a pulling blocker. The last picture in this series depicts a player who has stepped toward the line of scrimmage. He cannot open his hips properly and is forced to "roll around" his lead step (Photo D).



Photo A

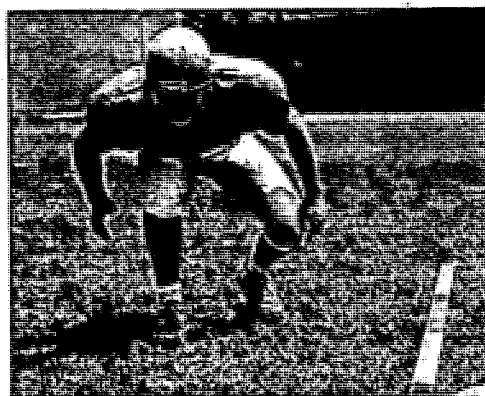


Photo B

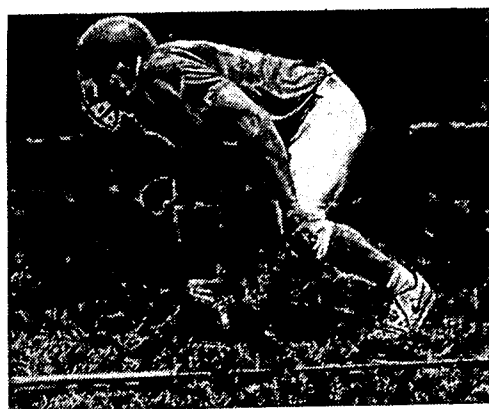


Photo C

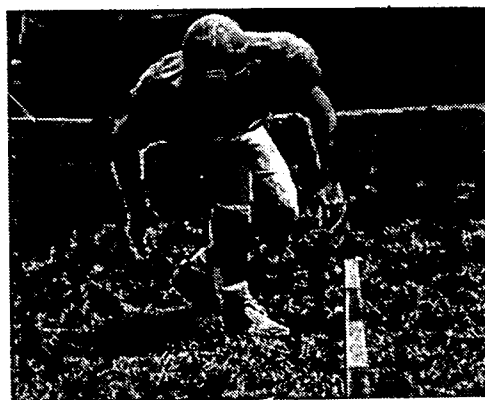


Photo D

The Flat Pull (Kick or Log)

Purpose: To enable the guard to pull and block the end man on the line of scrimmage.

1. Follow the basic pulling technique.
2. Locate the defender to be blocked on the first step.
3. Pull flat down the line of scrimmage, no deeper than the original depth of the heels of the offensive linemen.
4. Block the end man on the line of scrimmage by keying his reaction.
 - (a) If his shoulders are square to the line of scrimmage and he has closed down with the down block, log him inside by blocking his outside number (Diagram A).
 - (b) If he gets penetration upfield or widens, kick him out by blocking through his inside number. The blocker must accelerate his feet to get them out of the hole (Diagram B).

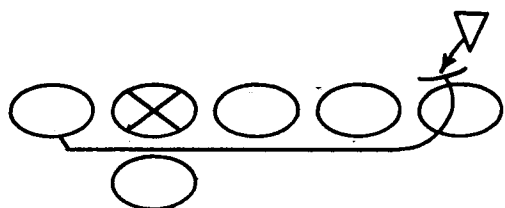


Diagram A

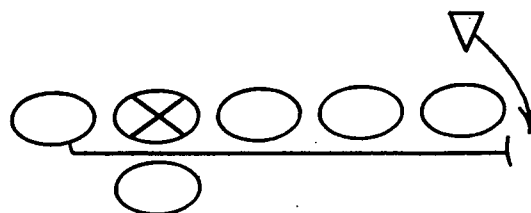


Diagram B

Pull and Lead

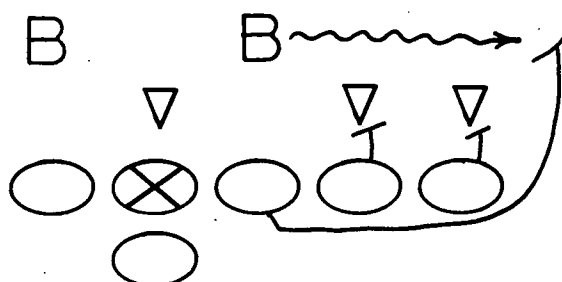
Purpose: This block is used on the outside running plays such as the sweep to enable the frontside guard to get up the field to block the first support (usually an outside linebacker or a strong safety).

1. Follow the basic pulling technique.
 2. The blocker's path should be upfield just behind the heels of the offensive tackle and tight end.
- Run at full speed.

3. Dip the inside shoulder when turning upfield, "grab the grass."

4. The blocker should attempt to run the defender over if possible, rather than cut block him.
5. The point of aim should be the bottom of the numbers.
6. If the defender is flowing fast and the blocker cannot run him over, then he should chop block the defender by leaving his feet.

- (a) Point of aim is 4 inches above the defender's playside knee.
- (b) Be close enough to step on the defender's toes before exploding through the playside thigh.
- (c) Explode through the playside thigh with the backside shoulder.
- (d) Once contact is made, concentrate on uncoiling.
- (e) The blocker should leave his feet by snapping his knees out as he explodes through the playside thigh.
- (f) Finish the block by scrambling on all fours.



The Pull and Lead

The Counter Trey

Purpose: This block will get more men to the point of attack. The backside guard will pull and block the end man on the line of scrimmage. He will kick him out or log him in depending upon his reaction. The tackle will pull and block the defender responsible for force, and his path will depend on the block of the guard.

A. Procedure for the Guard

1. Follow the basic pulling technique.
2. Locate the defender to be blocked on the first step.

3. Pull flat down the line of scrimmage, no deeper than the original depth of the heels of the offensive linemen.
4. Block the end man on the line of scrimmage by keying his reaction.
 - (a) If his shoulders are square to the line of scrimmage and he has closed down with the down block, log him in by drive blocking his outside number (Diagram A).
 - (b) If he gets penetration upfield or widens, kick him out by blocking through his inside number (Diagram B).

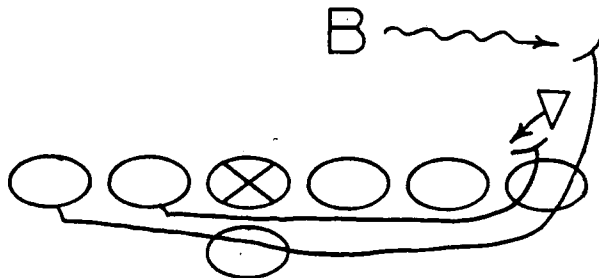


Diagram A

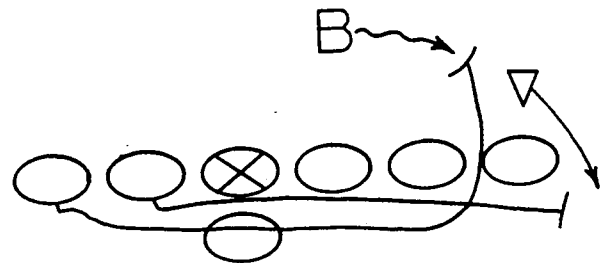


Diagram B

B. Procedure for the Tackle

1. Follow the basic pulling technique, except the tackle will lose ground slightly.
2. Find the pulling guard.
3. The tackle should gain depth until he is a yard deeper than the guard and a yard to a yard and a half behind him. The reason for this is two-fold:
 - (a) If there is penetration along the line of scrimmage and the guard is tripped up, the tackle can clear the pile. If the tackle can clear the pile rather than be toppled in a domino effect, there is still a chance for success.
 - (b) By being deeper than the guard, the tackle can get a view of the defensive pursuit and locate the defender that he will most likely block ("Get the big picture").

4. Determine the path to the force by keying the guard's block on the end man of the line of scrimmage.

(a) If the guard has logged his man, turn up outside of the block.

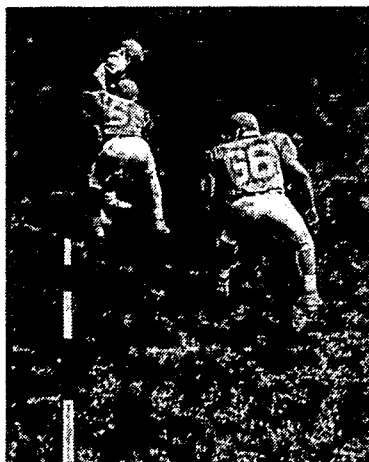
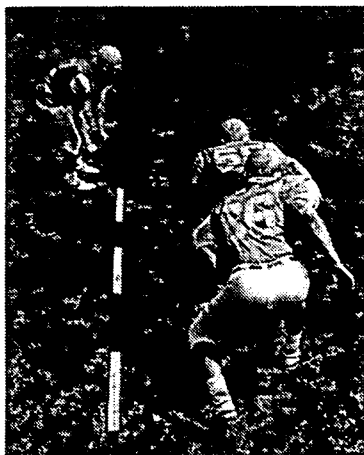
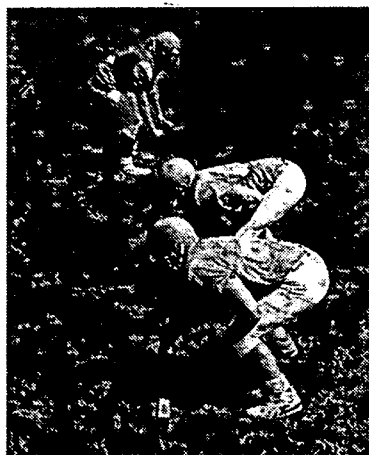
(b) If the guard has kicked his man out, turn up inside the block.

5. Once clear of the guard's block, locate the defender to be blocked looking from inside out.

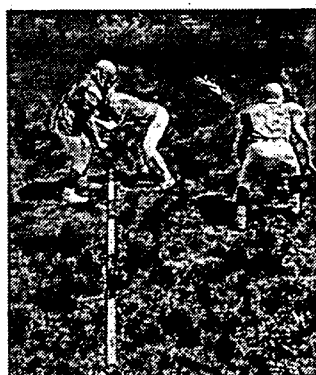
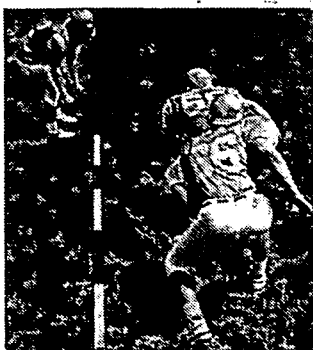
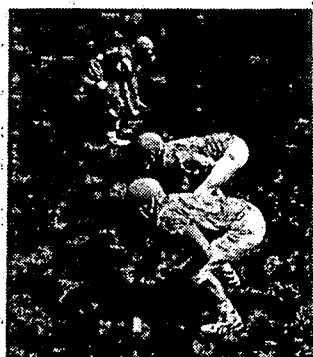
6. Determine how to block the defender by his pursuit angle.

(a) If he flies upfield, kick him out (Series 1).

(b) If he comes under control, engage him and seal him to the inside (Series 2).



Series 1



Series 2

The Trap Pull

Purpose: The trap is used to lure a hard charging defender into penetrating across the line of scrimmage by not blocking him with the blocker aligned opposite him. The block comes from an offensive lineman who pulls from the opposite side of the line and makes contact from the blind side.

1. Follow the basic pulling technique.
2. Locate the defender to be trapped on the first step.
3. Gain ground into the line of scrimmage and strive for an inside-out position on the defender.
 - (a) Teach the blocker to make his course right behind the feet of the offensive linemen as they leave the line. This will put him in a perfect inside-out trap position. Point out that the feet of the leaving offensive linemen are deeper as he goes down the line, so his course must be deeper into the line.
4. The initial point of aim is just above the defender's hip.

5. Kick the defender out with a drive block or a near shoulder block.

(a) When using a near shoulder block, the blocker should be taught to hit with the same shoulder as the direction in which he is pulling, "pull right, hit right," "pull left, hit left."

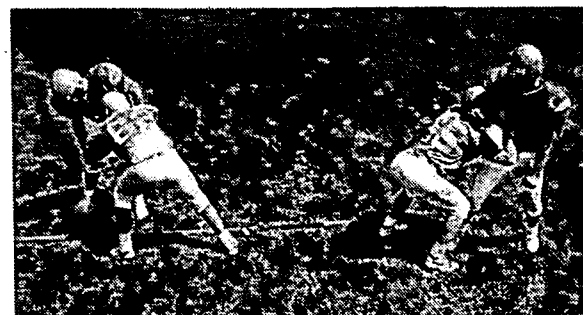
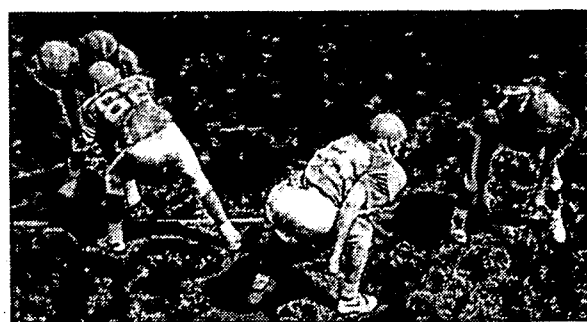
(b) The blocker's head should always be on the defender's upfield hip. "Get the head in the hole." This way the defender will not be able to roll out of the block into the hole.

6. Once contact is made, the blocker must get movement. "Block through the man, not to the man." The blocker must not leave his feet in the hole.

7. If the defender pinches to the inside or is aligned so tight that he cannot be trapped, the blocker will log him by using a reach block.

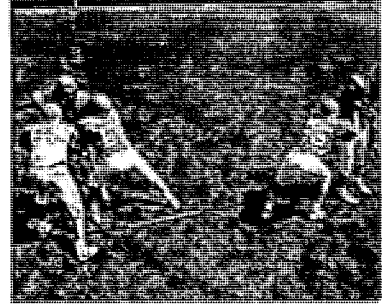
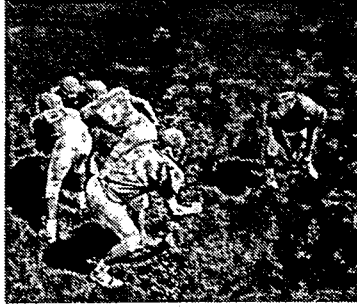
8. If the defender has penetrated to such a great depth that he is no longer a factor in the play, the blocker will turn up through the hole and lead the ball carrier.

Series 1 demonstrates a trap versus an even front with a gap step block by the center and an influence pull by the right guard.



Series 1

Series 2 demonstrates a trap versus an odd front, with a double team by the center and the right guard on the nose guard.



Series 2

PASS PROTECTION

Introduction

To maintain consistency in a passing offense, each individual involved in pass protection must play a vital role in the effectiveness of protecting the passer. Every offensive player must not only work individually, but collectively as one well coordinated unit. Every offensive player in one way or another is an integral part of the pass protection system. The receivers, by running well-timed, precise routes, enable the quarterback to throw within the protection time allowed by his offensive linemen. The quarterback, by setting to throw in the correct position for the type of protection called, allows the offensive linemen to know where the pass will be thrown from and channel rushers away from that point. The running backs are important as blitz blockers. Every blitz must be picked up. The backs also serve as "safety valve" receivers to whom the quarterback can dump the ball off when under a heavy rush. For the passer to throw the ball with any degree of accuracy, he must be free of harassment from any opponent and should be able to see downfield. To accomplish this the blockers must provide a clear area between themselves and the passer. From a psychological standpoint, good pass protection is critical to offensive confidence and success, and good pass protection begins with the offensive line.

Pass protection is the offensive lineman's greatest challenge. From a technical standpoint, it is perhaps the most difficult phase of the game to master because it is so unnatural. However, pass blocking can be taught and developed to a much greater degree than any other phase of football. This can only be accomplished through hard work and attention to detail. The offensive lineman must be able to perform this fundamental skill under the most adverse conditions when everyone in the stadium knows the offense is going to pass.

The offensive lineman must possess a dogged determination to succeed and take great pride in his ability to protect the passer. Pass protection in its simplest form can be reduced to the offensive lineman's having more desire to keep his man off the passer than the defender has to get to the passer. All the technique in the world cannot help him if he does not have the burning desire to get the job done. He

must refuse to be beaten. Good offensive linemen are "stubborn" but intelligent people.

How is success measured for the pass blockers? There are three areas of emphasis that give blockers goals towards which to strive.

1. The number of interceptions the quarterback throws. Most interceptions are caused by batted balls or hurried throws, which are a result of poor protection.

2. The number of times the quarterback is forced to scramble from the passing point. The ball is supposed to be thrown from a specific point at a specific time and any deviation from this, caused by poor protection, usually results in a bad play.

3. The number of times the quarterback is sacked behind the line of scrimmage attempting to pass. Some sacks are caused by great pass coverage, but most result from poor protection.

Common Causes of Pass Protection Breakdowns

When a blocker evaluates himself to determine why he broke down on pass protection, he will probably find that he made one or more of the following mistakes:

1. Failure to get set quickly.
2. Poor foot work, which results in poor blocking position.
3. Overaggressiveness. Trying to initiate contact rather than being patient.
4. Dropping the head and losing his balance.
5. Feet too wide, with the toes pointing out, losing mobility.
6. Straightening the knees will also cause the blocker to lose mobility.
7. Turning the shoulders parallel to the sideline, thus giving the rusher an inside lane to the passer.
8. Raising the elbows, giving the rusher "handles" to grasp.
9. Honoring outside fakes.
10. Giving ground too rapidly.
11. Being surprised by a change in the rusher's technique.
12. Lack of concentration.

13. Allowing the rusher to keep his hands on him rather than knocking them off.
14. Failure to squeeze the wide rusher to the outside.
15. Allowing the inside rusher to turn the blocker's inside shoulder.
16. Not concentrating on the aiming point, which is the bottom of the defender's numbers. The blocker then becomes vulnerable to head and shoulder fakes.
17. Bending at the waist instead of the knees.

General Pass Protection Guidelines

1. Get set up quickly into a good fundamental position with the knees bent, head up and, the body under control. If the defender contacts the blocker who is still leaning back to set up, he'll have the advantage.
2. Know where the passing spot or launch point is on each play. The blocker must know which side to favor as well as how deep he can be without interfering with the pass.
3. Make contact with the defender at or near the line of scrimmage. The guard's shoulders should be parallel to the line of scrimmage. The tackle's shoulders may be at a slight angle but never parallel to the sidelines.
4. Unless it is an aggressive pass, let the rusher make the first commitment. Being overanxious or overaggressive will lead to breakdowns. Be "patiently aggressive."
5. In preparation to meet the defender's charge, the blocker must keep the center of his body directly between the rusher and the passer. "Cover his numbers with your numbers."
6. The blocker must follow any commitment he makes by immediately fighting to regain fundamental position.
7. The blocker must never let the rusher get into his body and force him into an upright position. If the blocker stands upright, he will lose leverage and balance and be unable to control the rusher. If he is unable to get away from the rusher, he must give ground grudgingly and work his body down low again into a good fundamental position.

8. It is better to give ground grudgingly, while still maintaining position, than to overcommit and lose the defender too quickly.

9. If the defender tries to pull or jerk him, the blocker should maintain leverage with his hands, hitting up and through the breast plate. The blocker should lock out his arms, stagger the feet and sit down. "If he pulls, you push and sit."

10. The blocker should always slide or shuffle his feet quickly, using power steps to regain position. The more his feet are in contact with the ground, yet still moving, the faster he is able to push off the ground when reacting to the rusher. Hopping should be avoided. "Grab the grass with your feet."

11. The blocker must keep his knees bent, head up, and chin back. This will prevent him from overextending. The body follows the head.

12. If no rusher comes, the blocker becomes a "free protector," and he should not remain near the line of scrimmage. The blocker must get enough depth to pick up a delayed rusher or help pick up an escaping rusher. "Be busy."

13. When picking up an escaping rusher, "stick him." Let him know he's been hit.

14. The blocker must never quit until he hears the whistle. "Stay after your man."

15. The blocker must carry out his assignment alone. He must never depend on a free man to pick up his man.

16. When blocking a linebacker or a deep back blitzing, the blocker must remember that they are usually smaller and more agile than a big lineman. They will almost invariably try to juke or outmaneuver the blocker rather than allow him to take them on. The blocker must be aware of this fundamental difference as he prepares to block them. It is helpful to meet a blitzing linebacker or deep back at or near the line of scrimmage where there is less room to maneuver.

17. The blocker must never lose his poise if he breaks down once. He must analyze his technique and that of his opponent to correct his error (e.g., Did I shut my eyes? Was my head down? Did I bend at the waist? What did he do to cause the breakdown?).

18. The blocker's ability to accurately analyze his technique cannot be overemphasized. He must be flexible as to his method of attack. If he is being beaten using one method, he must make some changes. However, he must have confidence that if he executes his techniques properly, he will handle his man an excellent percentage of the time. The blocker must always have a primary and at least one secondary plan that he can employ. He should never rely on only one technique or plan of action.

19. While it is understood that the blocker can only hold off the defender for a limited period of time, the blocker must accept the responsibility of providing whatever time necessary to get the ball off. He must never use the excuse that he had his man long enough if the quarterback is sacked.

20. The offensive lineman must remember that pass protection is something that he must think about and work on as long as he plays football.

Pass Protection Terminology

Angle. The width and depth of the kick step to the outside. The toe and heel of the kick step should be north-south (perpendicular to the line of scrimmage) so the shoulders do not turn as the blocker works to the outside.

Bailing Out. Dropping the inside or outside foot, which turns the blocker's shoulders, creating a "soft shoulder," which gives the rusher a direct route to the passer.

Beat Around the Corner. When the rusher gets past the blocker to the outside. This is usually caused by bailing out to the outside, giving a soft shoulder and using a poor angle to get to the intersection between the rusher and the passer.

Bump. The solid collision two blockers should feel when they switch men on twists.

Circle Move. When a defender makes an outside move, trying to beat the blocker to the outside. An upfield move from an outside position should be treated as a circle.

Counter Hand. Usually the outside hand held at eye level to counter the outside shoulder swats or grabs by a defender.

Duck Position. The combination of coaching points used to keep the blocker in an overexaggerated

breakdown position, so he will not lean. Head and shoulders back, butt down, etc. The biggest mistake blockers make is not staying in the duck position when working for the wide rusher.

Feelers. Use both hands to feel what is coming from the defender in the way of pass rush moves.

Five-Yard Area. As the offensive tackle is working to get to the intersection to the outside and the rusher tries to beat the blocker upfield, eventually the rusher will be 5 yards upfield from the initial line of scrimmage. At that point, the tackle can turn his shoulder, kick the outside foot back, and ride the rusher around to the outside. Up until 5 yards, the blocker should keep his shoulders square to the line of scrimmage.

Force the Switch. When the blocker recognizes a twist stunt because his man loops away from him and around the defender on his adjacent blocker, he must force the collision with his partner. This collision will bump his partner off to pick up the looping defender while he takes over the partner's block. (Coaching Point: The blocker whose man loops must make a call "switch" or "X" to alert his partner that he will be forcing the switch).

Funnel. The technique of the blocker who has the penetrating defender in a twist stunt. When he hears "switch" or "X," he must funnel or escort the defender to his partner to make sure the switch occurs. He must never leave his man until he feels the collision.

Grab. A call used by the blocker who has the penetrating defender in a twist stunt when the rusher grabs him, not allowing the switch to occur.

Hopping. When the inside foot moves before the outside foot hits the ground.

Intersection. When the blocker reaches a point where he has one half of the defender from inside out without turning his shoulders. The blocker should be outside, knee to the defender's crotch. The wider and faster the defender, the deeper the intersection point will occur.

Jam. The strike or punch phase of the block. The hands should be held at eye level before jamming. The blocker will jam up and through the defender's breast plate.

Jam Protection. The linemen will step forward and jam rather than take a normal pass set. Used on

quick or play action passes.

Keep the Head Out. When jamming, the blocker must not bury his head. He must explode up with the hands when jamming, throwing the head back on contact.

Kick Step. The direction of the outside or set foot. The foot will be kicked over and back to get one half of the defender when he is in an outside shade.

Lean-Leaning. When the upper body tips forward and the blocker can no longer move laterally or vertically because of his forward momentum. A "leaner" will make up the distance to block a rusher by leaning forward and hitting with the head, rather than kicking one more step to get in proper position to jam.

Lift Him Off the Ground. On the jam, strike up, not out. Get good leverage on the defender to make him restart his charge.

Loop. When a defender circles back on the defensive line of scrimmage to allow another defender to penetrate.

Lockout. Both arms immediately lock or stiffen on contact with the rusher. The blocker cannot deliver a powerful blow if the lockout comes too soon.

One Half the Man. When a defender is shaded inside or outside, the blocker need only to take away half of him with the first step, whether moving the set foot or the post foot.

Post Foot. The inside foot. The post foot must be up and the set foot back when pass blocking.

Post Knee. The knee of the inside or post foot. It must be bent with good power-producing angles so the blocker can move quickly when adjusting to a rusher's charge.

Post Stagger. The foot position when setting.

Power Step. Pounding the post foot into the ground while moving laterally to defeat an inside move. The ball of the foot must be driven hard into the ground. The blocker must not overstride when power stepping.

Separation. After reaching the intersection and jamming the defender, back straight off, keeping on the

same angle. The blocker must not back in toward the passer, nor should he turn his shoulders.

Set Foot. The outside foot.

Shuffle. Sliding the inside foot first when trying to gain speed to get to the intersection.

Shift the Hips. Changing the weight from one side to the other by shifting the hips over the knee the blocker will push off with. The blocker must not open the knees. He must keep them perpendicular to the line of scrimmage.

Slide. Usually the post foot slides to half the distance the set foot has kick stepped to the outside. The post foot slides after the kick step.

Soft Shoulder. When a blocker bails out to the outside or inside, his shoulder is easier for the defender to collapse or turn. This gives the rusher a direct line to the quarterback.

Spread Out. When the post foot and the set foot are too wide, there will be no power. The blocker must get back to a power position to jam.

Squat. The blocker will sink his butt as he is establishing the post foot and moving the set foot, to keep himself low.

Stretch. The blocker must keep moving with his man as he moves. He must maintain the one half of the man relationship. The blocker must not drop to the outside foot, turning the shoulders. Kick the outside foot over and back but lose ground to gain position.

Target. The point of eye focus to help keep the proper relationship to the rusher. The smallest area on the rusher's jersey, generally the bottom of the numbers. The blocker must not lose his target. Do not focus on the big picture.

Timing the Jam. The blocker must strike with proper timing when blocking a rusher. If he strikes too soon, his arms will already be fully extended on contact and he will "catch" the defender rather than deliver a blow. If he strikes too late, the defender will already have his hands on the blocker, easily defeating him. The blocker should wait until he can deliver a 6-inch punch up and through the defender.

Tuck the Chin In. The blocker must try to pull his chin back into his throat, as in bench pressing, to keep

the head and shoulders back. This will be an isometric contraction.

Work the Line. When the offensive tackle gets to the intersection and the defender has not reached 5 yards upfield, the blocker should jam the rusher with good inside-out position and separate straight back.

The line does not occur until the intersection point. The line is an imaginary line perpendicular to the line of scrimmage. It begins at the intersection and continues back to the goal line. The rusher must not be allowed inside this line. This concept is used to help the offensive tackle understand the necessity of maintaining the width of the pocket.

The Passing Area

The goal in drop-back protection is to create a clean pocket, free of defenders, from which the quarterback can operate. This area is referred to as the "passing area" or "no man's zone." While this statement may appear obvious, it is the first principle that the offensive lineman must understand in order to become an effective pass blocker. It is helpful to paint the boundaries of the passing area on the practice field in the area where the offensive line does its individual drills. This can be done during preseason practice to facilitate learning (Diagram A).

There are several points which must be understood:

1. It is the duty of the offensive linemen to prevent penetration into the passing area.
2. The passing area is an area from a depth of 3 to 9 yards, with the outside shoulders of the offensive tackles forming the edge of the pocket.
3. The guards and center are responsible for maintaining the depth of the pocket. The tackles are responsible for the width.
4. The area outside of the passing area will be referred to as the combat area.
5. The tackles should never turn their shoulders before three-yards depth on a five-step drop and 5 yards on a seven-step drop.

No matter what the teaching approach, the linemen must understand that absolutely no one (with the exception of the quarterback) must ever set foot in this area. If the coach fails to convey this message, it

won't matter what techniques are taught. With this concept understood, we can now proceed to the techniques of individual pass protection.

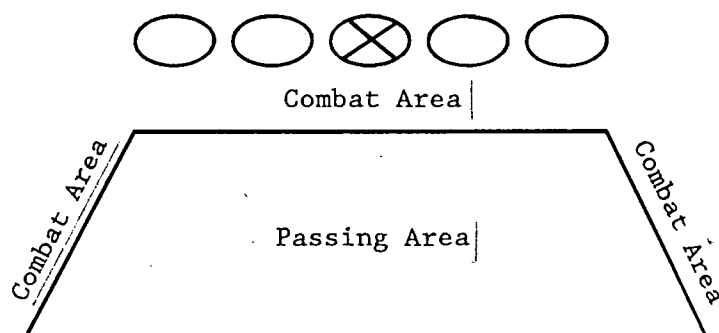


Diagram A

Pass Protection Techniques

The Stance

The proper stance for an offensive lineman was discussed previously, but it must be emphasized that a blocker must always use the same stance. An adjustment in stance that gives away the blocker's intention to pass block gives the advantage to the defense. However, the blocker should mentally shift his weight to his push foot and "curl his toes into the grass," so he is prepared to make his initial step when getting set.

Body Position

A pass blocker's success depends upon his ability to move from his stance to his set position. He must move into this position as quickly as possible. The proper setup will put the blocker in a good position to block his man. Most of the pass protector's problems stem from improper weight balance and body position in the set. Ideally, the set position is maintained until the pass is thrown.

1. The feet must maintain a staggered relationship, with the inside foot always being the front or post foot and the back foot being considered the stagger foot. The feet are shoulder-width apart in a toe-heel relationship. The toes are pointed forward in order to permit maximum power to be exerted from within the framework of the body and to keep the shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage.

2. The knees are bent with the hips pulled back and toward the post knee. In order to maintain proper balance, the post knee must be positioned over the toes of the post foot, otherwise the weight will be back on the heels and it will be harder for the blocker to push off in any direction. The angle of the knee bend is determined by the greatest anticipated threat. If the defender is aligned close to the blocker and power is the main concern, the protector must strive for *maximum knee bend*. If the opponent is aligned wide and speed to the intersection is the major concern, the protector must assume a more erect position.

3. The back is arched with the chest, shoulders and chin pulled as far back as balance will permit. This position of the upper torso is critical, as it prevents the blocker from being pulled forward.

4. The blocker's head should be at the same level as the rusher's numbers.

5. The hands are held open and close together, with the elbows bent until the jam is initiated.

A front and side view of the set are pictured below.



Setting Squarely

The footwork for setting up squarely on the defender is determined by the opponent's alignment. The concept of having a variety of pass sets is designed to tell the blocker what initial movement he should make on the snap to put himself in the best possible position to block his man. The blocker's set position prior to contact must be in a direct line between the defender and the quarterback.

There are four basic ways in which a defender can align himself in relation to the blocker.

1. *The inside shade or inside eye alignment.* The rusher aligns himself so that his outside eye is aligned opposite the blocker's inside eye.
2. *The head up alignment.* The defender is aligned "nose to nose" with the blocker.
3. *The outside shade or outside eye alignment.* The rusher aligns with his inside eye directly opposite the blocker's outside eye.
4. *The wide alignment.* The rusher is aligned outside the blocker's lineup position, with no part of his body aligned opposite that of the blocker's.

We will now discuss the proper set for each alignment, beginning with the inside shade.

If the defender is in an inside shade alignment, the blocker must take a lateral power step with the post foot followed by a slide with the stagger or set foot. This set is referred to as a *power slide* and is the most difficult of the techniques (Photo A). The shortest route to the quarterback is to the inside and the defender is in good position to penetrate to the inside by his alignment. It is suggested that coaches design their protection schemes so as to give help to the protector whose opponent is aligned in an inside technique.



Photo A

If the opponent is in a head up alignment, the blocker's first move must be a short power slide. This

movement is referred to as a *jab slide* (Photo B). Even though the defender is in a head up alignment, the blocker's first move is to the inside. The reason for this is that the defender can easily penetrate to the inside from a head up alignment.



Photo B

If the defender is in an outside shade alignment, the blocker does not need to move laterally as he is already in position to take away the inside rush. He will drop his foot back about 6 inches, then he will move his inside foot to keep balance. This technique is referred to as the *drop set* or *quick set* (Photo C).



Photo C

If the opponent uses a wide alignment, the blocker's movement is referred to as the *kick slide* (Photo D). The stagger foot kicks over and back and the inside foot slides. The blocker must kick slide until he intercepts the opponent. The depth of the kick is determined by the opponent's speed and his relative width from the blocker. The further away the rusher is, the steeper the angle the blocker will take to intercept him (Photo E).



Photo D



Photo E

In all of these sets, it is important for the blocker to keep his shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage as long as possible and not allow himself to be turned by the defender. If the blocker can keep his shoulders from being turned, he will be better able to react to his opponents' different pass rush techniques.

Another important factor for the blocker is that he be able to maintain the post-stagger relationship with his feet. He must be able to power slide versus the inside rush and kick slide versus the outside rush. The post-stagger relationship provides better balance and mobility than does a parallel stance.

Jamming

This is probably the most debated pass protection fundamental. Many coaches advocate the immediate lockout of the arms, but this creates two problems. First, relatively little power can be generated by taking on an opponent in a pre-extended position. Second, a good pass rusher will use the blocker's arms

The preferred method is to hold the hands closer to the body to avoid being grabbed, until the rusher is close enough to initiate the jam. The *timing of the jam* is of critical importance in delivering a powerful blow. If the blocker initiates the jam too early, his arms will already be locked out at contact and he will "catch" the rusher rather than deliver a blow (Photo A). If the blocker waits too long to initiate the jam, the rusher will be into the blocker's body and be able to grab the blocker and throw him aside (Photo B).

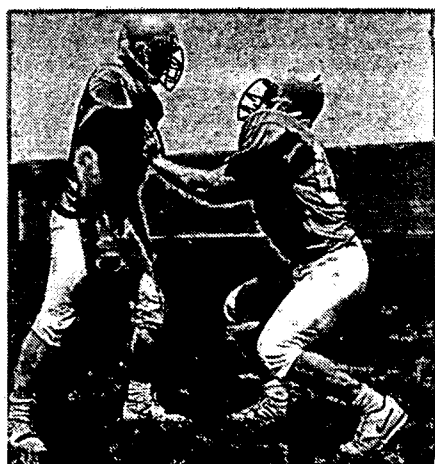


Photo A



Photo B

The jam must have sufficient power to stun the opponent and force him to restart or reroute his rush. The head and shoulders are thrown back simultaneously with the jam to prevent the rusher from grabbing the blocker's shoulder pads.

Routes the Rusher Can Take to the Quarterback

There are only three routes the defender can take to rush the passer. He can go inside, outside or right over the blocker.

The goal of the offensive lineman is to keep all pass rushers in front of him regardless of the route they take. Let us now examine how to stop each of the three rushes.

1. *The Inside Rush.* This is the most dangerous of the three rushes because the inside route is the rusher's shortest path to the passer. When the rusher takes the inside route, the blocker will employ the power slide technique. As the rusher starts inside, the blocker will power slide to the inside, keeping his

shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage as long as possible. When the rusher begins to cross the blocker's face, the blocker will now change from a pass block to a drive block. The blocker will now drive his head across the front of the rusher and ram his far shoulder and forearm into the rusher's near number and drive him into the pile.

2. *The Outside Rush.* When the rusher chooses the outside route, the blocker has the advantage of having more time in which to react. The blocker must be careful not to commit himself too soon to blocking the outside rusher and then getting beaten to the inside. As the rusher starts to the outside, the blocker will kick slide to the outside to get width while keeping his shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage. The blocker will "squeeze" the rusher from the inside out, causing him to rush in as wide an arc as possible. The blocker will keep a foot-to-crotch relationship with the rusher as he squeezes him. However, he must still keep his weight over the post foot to avoid vulnerability to the inside move, as he kick slides to the outside. When the rusher reaches the "point of no return," which is the point at which the rusher's depth of penetration and forward momentum make it almost impossible to change direction and rush to the inside, the blocker will drop step with his outside foot and drive the defender out around the passing point. If the defender reaches the point of no return and spins back to the inside underneath the blocker, he must drop his inside foot back to a parallel position with his outside foot and pick up the defender. Again, it cannot be overemphasized how important it is for the blocker to keep his shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage. When blocking the outside rusher, the blocker must never turn his shoulders to the sideline unless he is in contact with the rusher and his head is to the upfield side of his opponent. The blocker should always strive to maintain his shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage as long as the rusher is a threat to his inside.

3. *The Head On or Bull Rush.* When the rusher chooses the head on rush, he is trying to either run the blocker over or drive him back into the quarterback. When the rusher is aligned in a head up alignment, the blocker must anticipate the possibility of a head on rush. The blocker must get set quickly using either a jab slide or a quick set. When facing a head on rush, it is imperative that the blocker *set on*

ment, the blocker must anticipate the possibility of a head on rush. The blocker must get set quickly using either a jab slide or a quick set. When facing a head on rush, it is imperative that the blocker *set on the line of scrimmage* so that the rusher cannot build as much momentum. Once the blocker delivers a punch, he must slide and mirror the defender using his arms as "feelers" to provide information as to the rusher's next move. He must be ready to handle an inside or outside rush. If the rusher begins to overpower the blocker and he is losing ground fast, he must take a stand, as he cannot allow himself to be driven back into the quarterback. The blocker must lockout his arms and drive the stagger knee toward the ground. He will then give grudgingly. The blocker must keep his hips underneath him with his weight always over his feet (Photo A).



Photo A

Pass Rush Techniques and Counters

There are four basic pass rush techniques that a defensive lineman will employ in an effort to defeat the pass protector. They are the bull rush, which we have already covered, the swim technique, the rip technique, and the spin technique.

1. *The Swim Technique.* When using the swim technique, the rusher will attempt to grab one of the blocker's shoulders with one arm and reach or "swim" over that shoulder with his other arm as he pulls himself by the blocker. In a variation of this technique, he may strike a blow with his forearm to the

outside of the blocker's wrist, driving the blocker's arm across his body. As this contact is made, the rusher will swim over that shoulder with his other arm. To combat this, the blocker will lockout the arm of the shoulder that is being grabbed and sink his hips. The blocker will drive his other hand up into the armpit of the rusher and stand him up. Teach the blocker, "If he grabs you, push and sit." To counter the wrist-strike technique, the blocker must have his hands at eye level and use "fist and wrists" to knock the rusher's hands away (Photo B).



Photo B

2. *The Rip Technique.* With this technique, the rusher will lower his shoulder and drive it under the armpit (either inside or outside) of the blocker, while at the same time, his arm will rip up and through, lifting the blocker's shoulder as much as possible. To counter this technique, the blocker will clamp down on the arm that the rusher is ripping with, using his arm, and will put his other hand on the rusher's hip. From this position, the blocker will ride the rusher to the outside if he was ripping that way or drive him into the pile if he ripped inside (Photo C and D).



Photo C

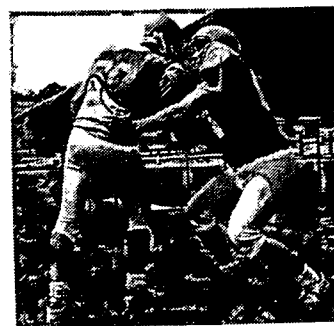


Photo D

3. *The Spin Technique.* In this technique, the rusher will start his rush in one direction in an attempt to force the blocker to overcommit to that move, and then spin back in the other direction. The blocker can counteract the spin move several ways:

- (a) If the rusher spins quickly, the blocker will keep his hands on the rusher and maintain contact with him (Photo E, F, and G).
- (b) If the rusher is slow in his spin, the blocker will initiate a drive block and "put the rusher on the ground."
- (c) If the rusher spins away from the line of scrimmage, the blocker will recoil and set himself for the rusher's next move. In this situation, it is important for the blocker not to overcommit since the defender is not a threat to the quarterback from his side of the line of scrimmage.



Photo E



Photo F



Photo G

Protecting Against a Defensive Twist

A twist is when two defensive linemen cross as they rush the passer. There are two types of twist: a quick twist and a delayed twist.

A quick twist occurs when two down linemen cross at or near the line of scrimmage. In a delayed twist, the down linemen cross after rushing three or four steps. In each twist, one defender will penetrate a specific gap while the other down lineman will loop behind him. The objective of the twist is for one

defender, who is penetrating, to occupy two blockers by forcing the blocker he is aligned on to a level deep enough to "pick off" the other blocker. In this way, the looping defender will have an easier time rushing the passer.

In protecting against either twist, it is important for both blockers to be in the same vertical plane. By being on the same vertical plane, both blockers can switch without being picked off. To accomplish this, both blockers must recognize when a twist situation exists. When two adjacent offensive linemen are covered in a passing situation, a twist is possible. Whichever blocker recognizes the twist situation must alert his teammate with a line call. On the snap of the ball, both blockers will step back and toward one another with the near foot (Photo A). By stepping back in this manner, the blockers will create space between themselves and the defenders. This distance will give the blockers time to recognize the defenders' intentions. This method is especially effective against the delayed twist because the distance between the blockers and the defenders will cause the defenders to declare their intentions or "force their hand" so to speak.

It is important for both blockers to communicate with one another to protect against the twist. The *loopman*, or the blocker whose opponent loops behind his defensive teammate who is penetrating, must identify the twist. The loopman knows that, if his opponent is looping in one direction, then there is another defender penetrating in the opposite direction (Photo B). The loopman is the only person who can see a twist, as the blocker who has the penetrator does not know whether his opponent is penetrating on a twist or is simply slanting. When the loopman recognizes the twist, he must *force the switch* by forcing a collision with his partner (Photo C). This collision will bump his partner off to pick up the looper while he takes over the penetrator from his teammate (Photo D). The loopman must communicate with his partner by calling out "switch" or "X" to alert his partner that he will be forcing the switch.

When the blocker who has the penetrator hears "switch" or "X" he must *funnel*, or escort the defender to his partner to make sure the switch occurs. He must fight to keep his shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage as he escorts the penetrator to his partner so that, when his teammate forces the switch, he

will be in good position to pick up the looper. He must never leave his man until he feels the collision, as in Photo E.

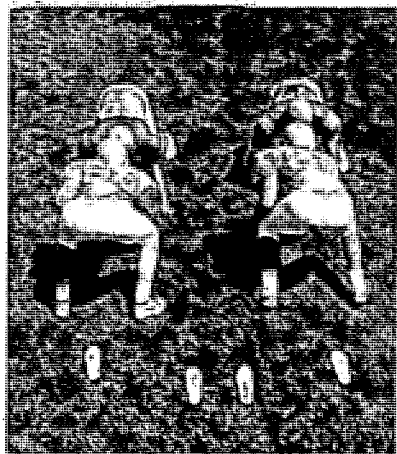


Photo A

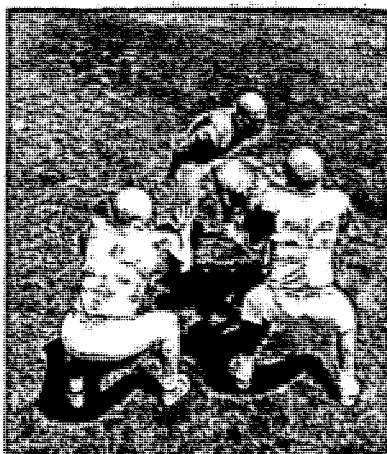


Photo B



Photo C

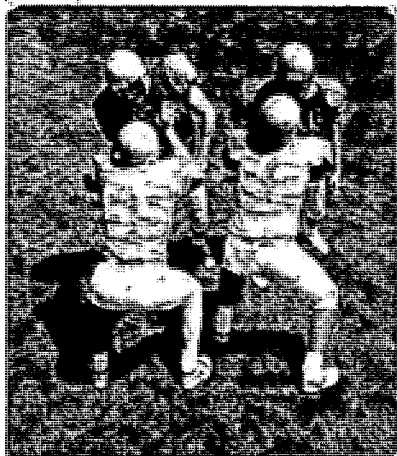


Photo D



Photo E

In order to counteract the switch, many defensive coaches will have the penetrator grab the offensive blocker so that the offense can not force the switch. To combat this, when one blocker is grabbed, he will call "grab" and drive block the penetrator into the line. The other blocker, who is working switch, upon hearing the "grab" call, should push off the hips of the blocker being grabbed and give ground to pick up the looping rusher.

Pass Teaching Progression

General Information

1. Always use two men working together.
 2. Teach the four phases in reverse order.
 3. Show each player the ideal position (set and fit) for pass protection.
- A. Fit Position (First Phase)
1. Position the defender in pass rush position and have the offensive blocker "fit" into him (Photo A).
 2. Offensive blocker:
 - (a) Head is back with shoulders square.
 - (b) Hips are down with the knees bent.
 - (c) Back is straight.
 - (d) Feet are shoulder width apart with the toes pointing straight ahead. The inside foot is always up.
 - (e) The heels of the palm are placed on the bottom of the defender's breast plate.
 - (f) The elbows are locked with the arms extended.



Photo A

B. Pressure (Second Phase)

1. From the fit position, the defender will move in either direction.
2. The blocker will slide and apply pressure with the arm in the direction the defender is moving.
(a) The blocker must not allow the opposite arm to become lazy and lose contact with the defender:
3. Keep the inside foot up and move the opposite foot accordingly to maintain a good base.

C. Pop (Third Phase)

1. The blocker will be in a "set" position.
2. As the defender approaches, the blocker will thrust or "pop" his arms up and through the defender.
3. Contact is made with the heel of the palms to control and stop the charge of the defender.
(a) The coach should look for the defender's shoulders to snap backwards.
4. From this position, the pressure drill can be added.
5. The pop phase can be emphasized by placing the blockers on their knees and only working the arm thrust.

D. Full Go (Fourth Phase)

1. The offensive blocker will start from a three-point stance.
2. The defender will rush from a three-point stance.
3. All the teaching phases of pass protection are combined (Photo A and B).



Photo A



Photo B

CONCLUSION

The fundamentals and techniques of offensive line play, as well as the physical and mental attributes necessary for success have been discussed. The author would now like to provide the reader with some final thoughts on the correct thought process that an offensive lineman should employ in order to effectively execute his techniques and carry out his assignments.

Effective line play begins in the huddle. Upon hearing the play called by the quarterback, the lineman should put the previous play out of his mind and concentrate only on the play being called. He should begin to concentrate on the most important part of his assignment. The quarterback will normally give the formation, which will determine the offensive alignment. He will then give the play—this relates to the point of attack, blocking rule, and type of technique to be used. Finally, the quarterback will inform his teammates of the snap count. This tells the offensive team when the ball will be put into play. The lineman must keep the snap count continually in mind. If he is slow coming off the ball or uncertain about anything, he will most assuredly fail to execute his assignment. It is impossible for him to be aggressive when he is uncertain.

As the quarterback prepares to break the huddle, the lineman must visualize the possible defenses, adjustments, and the calls he may have to make at the line. Upon breaking the huddle, the lineman must immediately key the defensive alignment, focusing his eyes on the defenders' alignment and relate his blocking rule to the defense. At the line of scrimmage, he must adjust his split according to the play and block to be used. The lineman must assume a balanced stance, mentally shifting his weight accordingly for an explosive start. He must concentrate on the snap count, the proper execution of his block, and a great deal of second effort.

As the lineman returns to the huddle after the play has been run, he must use this time wisely and to his advantage. He should review the alignment and technique used by the defender he blocked. In this way, he can evaluate and correct any mistakes he made so as not to repeat the error.

Intelligent, aggressive line play is vital to the success of a great offensive football team. Each and every

lineman should think that the team's success is dependent upon his ability to stop the man across from him. This is accomplished by film study and hard work on the practice field. No detail should be overlooked, regardless of how minute it may seem on the surface. Each lineman should have his own individual game plan for his opponent. When formulating his attack, he should ask himself some questions about his opponent. They are as follows:

1. Is he a "reader" who flexes off the line and reacts?
2. Is he a "penetrator" who charges recklessly?
3. Does he favor predetermined moves (inside, outside, in then out)?
4. Does he get off the ball quickly?
5. Does he charge low or high?
6. Does he use his hands well?
7. Does he seem to use his right arm and shoulder more than his left?
8. Does his alignment give away stunts or games?
9. Can he step first with either foot?
10. Can he be cut?
11. Is he protecting an injury?
12. What are his strengths and weaknesses?
 - (a) speed, reactions, strength, pursuit, and lateral movement
 - (b) hand position, butt-jerk, swim, or rip

The offensive lineman must have a good understanding of the basic defensive alignments he will face so that he can recognize them immediately. He must anticipate which alignments, charges, or blitzes are used with each front in addition to knowing the situations in which they most frequently occur. The lineman must also know which situations will require a checkoff to another play, as well as the plays that will be checked to. Based on past experiences and from film review, the best method of approaching each situation and defender should be decided upon ahead of time.

A good working knowledge of the defensive strategy and tactics is crucial to the success of the offense. Each lineman must also have a clear understanding of the total play, the point of attack on a run, and the launch point on a pass. It is impossible for the lineman to position himself properly or to anticipate his man's reaction if he does not have a good understanding of the total play.

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