



# PLAYBOOK

The 4-4 Defense



**PHOTO COPY AND CREATE PLAY SHEETS**

# ***Introduction to Defense***

When young kids decide to play football it is likely that the glory of scoring offensive touchdowns is what draws them to the game. Team defense and tackling isn't as glamorous as scoring offensive touchdowns, but teams that make a commitment to playing great defense will find the experience of playing football more complete and more successful. Coaches must make a commitment to becoming a good defensive football team by instituting tackling, pursuit, and position specific drills, which are available at [usafootball.com](http://usafootball.com). Although it can be difficult to coordinate the timing and movement of an opposing offense, giving equal time to these core defensive elements will give your team a better understanding of the game, and a better chance of stopping the opposition.

## **SCHEME**

Defensive schemes can be just as complex and sophisticated as offensive schemes. If the keys to a solid offense are timing, execution, and ball security then the keys to a solid defense are effort, pursuit, and tackling. Coaches will find that their defense will perform better if they can minimize the amount of thinking and reading you ask the young players to do. By aligning a defense in advantageous positions and giving them simple responsibilities, coaches will consistently find defensive players around the ball and playing with confidence. This playbook will cover the Stack 4-4 defense, which calls for 8 players in the box and offers simple blitz schemes that will confuse the offensive linemen and create lanes to the football. The Base 4-4 defense is a run stopping defense in its truest form, however, it does provide for some adjustments to combat teams that are prone to throwing the ball. The most important skill on defense is tackling, if you are not a good tackling team your defense will prove to be ineffective.



# Defensive Principles

To have a solid defensive football team, coaches must develop a philosophy that they will believe in, teach, and never waiver from. Printing out a list of principles and sticking them on a locker room wall or chalk board isn't enough. It's important that a coach institutes and sticks to his core principles throughout the season – at practice and during games.

**GGE:** *This stands for Give Great Effort – an anagram or phrase that coaches can use to motivate their players during practice. As a coach it is important that you coach every day with the energy and effort that you expect from your players. When coaches are not putting in the effort that they are expecting from the players it sends a poor message. In games it is important to “GGE” on every snap, regardless of the opponent, score, or time remaining. Praise hustle and effort every chance you get and don't spend time being negative to those players who are not giving great effort.*

**Tackle the Football:** *This principle begins with an emphasis on pursuit, which is a big part of GGE. All eleven defensive players should pursue and gang tackle the football. Pursuit and gang tackling are the keys to eliminating big plays. Being physical and finishing tackles with leg drive and aggression will help create turnovers and create pressure on the passing game.*

**Always be talking:** *This is not about trash talking with your opponent - something that should never happen - it's about communication amongst the defensive players. Defense players should alert each other of offensive motion, shifts, crack blocks, passes, reverses, counters, and anything else they can identify. When stunts or blitzes are called, players must communicate to ensure that everyone knows what gap they are shooting. Defensive players must also come back to the sideline and be able to inform coaches of things such as line splits, blocking schemes, or formation changes.*

**Execution:** *GGE, team pursuit, and communication are all important, however, executing the scheme is the key to great team defense. All 11 players must do their job and follow their assignments. Never let poor execution in practice go uncorrected.*

**Big Team little me:** *Always emphasize that the team is more important than the individual, or individuals. Everyone must know their job and trust that the other 10 teammates on the field know their job. Support each other and always celebrate individual success in relation to how it helped the TEAM.*

# ***Defensive Priorities***

**Discipline:** Ensure that players do things the “Coaches Way” and not their own way. If one player freelances and does not attack in the assigned manner this will lead to a breakdown in the Team Defense concept. Coaches do not have to yell and scream to enforce discipline. Patience and repetition will lead to a disciplined approach.

**Conditioning:** Practice fast, perform drills at full speed, and run from station to station. In the past, football conditioning was limited to wind sprints at the end of practice – this would not yield the desired result. Teaching fundamentals, scheme, and agility work at an intense pace is a smarter way to condition your players.

**Technique:** Great technique will make average athletes good and good athletes great. This includes starting in a great stance, not taking any false steps, and tackling with safe and fundamentally sound technique.

**Quickness:** Football has become more of a speed and quickness game as opposed to size and power game. Quickness on defense is much more important than speed in the 40 yard dash. Defenses that emphasize quickness off of the ball will have success in playing downhill and changing the LOS to their advantage. Daily agility work is essential to becoming a quicker football team.

**Mental Discipline:** Your players must focus on where they are supposed to line up in a given defense and what their assignment is once the ball is snapped. The more the players focus and understand, the more adjustments you can make to your scheme; this in turn makes it difficult for an offense to get a handle on what you are doing.

# ***Pursuit and Tackling***

Defensive team pursuit is all about desire and effort. Having all 11 players wanting to get to the football on every play will make your defense successful. As a Coach, you can evaluate team pursuit in a couple of ways. In practice you can blow a whistle before a play ends to make players “Freeze” where they are. Point out to each one of them if they are in a desired pursuit position or not. The other tool coaches can use to evaluate pursuit and effort is watching game film and freezing the image through-out the film to account for all 11 players and their relationship to the football.

## **Getting after the ball:**

- Find players with mental toughness that show desire
- Practice at a high tempo to condition the defense to have the same effort level throughout the game
- Speed and Quickness: React quickly; confusion will slow you down
- Agility drills make athletes better

## **Rules of pursuit:**

- Start with a great stance and proper steps
- It's all in the angle – make sure you can cut the ball off, no false steps
- Never follow the same colored jersey, good spacing = good pursuit
- Want to be the first to the ball
- Who has bootleg, counter and reverse responsibility? Keep someone at home, always

## **Once you get there:**

- Be under control in a balanced position, ready to strike
- Finish the tackle, never stop your feet
- Tackle in front, do not drag down the ball carrier if possible, minimize extra yards

## **The pursuit effect:**

- No long touchdowns
- Sends a message to your opponent that you will play every play to the whistle
- Promotes team unity, one guy breaks down, 10 others are backing him up
- Creates turnovers

# ***Becoming a Good Tackling Team***

The skill of tackling in football is in many ways like the skill of hitting a fastball in baseball. If a player has a fear of getting hit by the pitch, developing the skills necessary to hit the pitch becomes difficult. The same goes for tackling; young players may have a natural fear of contact. They may also be hesitant to reveal this fear, therefore coaches should always introduce tackling and contact in a safe and gradual manner. Tackling drills should be a part of every practice; the drills should vary and should not promote full speed collisions, as this may increase a player's fear. There are several great drills available to coaches to make your team a better tackling team.

## **KEYS TO BEING A GREAT TACKLER**

### **BODY POSITION:**

- Get in breakdown position with feet about shoulder width apart, knees bent, back flat, head up, and hands at the belt ready to shoot
- Get your body across and in front of the ball carrier (on the sideline or angle tackles)
- Shoot the hands through and reach for high cloth on the back of the ball carrier
- Stay on your feet and run through the ball carrier - only leave your feet in desperation

### **CONTACT:**

- Once contact is made the hips should roll into the ball carrier
- Arms should squeeze the ball carrier as you reach for high cloth
- The feet should never stop, use power steps (shorter steps with force) and drive through the tackle
- Always keep your head up with your eyes on the belt area to see what you are hitting
- Be physical, win the collision by driving the ball carrier backwards

### **FOOTWORK:**

- Sprint to the football, speed and quickness will get you there
- As you approach the ball carrier, shorten the steps and ensure that your base is not too wide or narrow
- Chop the feet and focus on the belt area of the ball carrier, it will take you to him
- Use power steps to drive the ball carrier backwards

Learn the proper way to teach tackling and fundamental tackling drills at [www.usafootball.com](http://www.usafootball.com)



# ***Defensive Goals***

Setting goals can be a great way to keep your defense motivated and focused on success. It is important to set goals that require the execution of defensive principles and priorities, however, it is equally important to set goals that can be attained and provide a connection between practice and game day success. For example, defensive players who work hard on becoming a better tracking team will gain confidence when their work pays off on game day. Coaches gain credibility when the goals they set for their players are met in game situations. Choose your goals carefully, make sure you can track them with film review or game day stats and adjust them throughout the year to encourage success.

## ***SAMPLE GOALS***

- Win the game
- Limit your opponents point total (adjust to your offense's ability to score but should be less than 14)
- Create 3 turnovers: fumble recovery, interception, offense turn-over on downs
- Force punts
- No runs over 20 yards
- No pass plays over 25 yards
- Hold opponent to less than 100 yards total rushing
- Hold opponent to less than 150 yards total passing
- Do not allow any drives of 10 plays or more
- Do not allow opponent inside the 30 yard line
- No first downs inside the 20 yard line
- Score on defense
- All 11 players pursue the football on every play
- No missed tackles
- Force 5 loss of yardage plays
- No wrong gaps (on stunts every player attacks the assigned gap)
- All players on their feet or making a tackle when the whistle blows



# Glossary

**BCR** – Assignment for contain defender when the point of attack appears to be away from them. They are responsible for Bootlegs, Counters, and Reverses coming back to their side.

**BACKSIDE** – The area away from the point of attack.

**BOOT** – A play in which the Quarterback rolls away from the flow in attempt to catch the defense over pursuing.

**BOX** – Generally considered the area just outside the Tight Ends or Tackle (when an End is split) and about 5 yards beyond the Line of Scrimmage.

**COUNTER** – An offensive play that appears to be attacking in one direction and comes back in the opposite direction.

**CRACK** – A call made by the Cornerbacks to alert the inside defensive players that an outside receiver is blocking down in the box.

**CONTAIN** – Keeping the ball on the inside shoulder on pass or run.

**CUSHION** – Describes the space between the Cornerback and the receiver.

**EDGE** – The area outside the Tight Ends or Tackle (when an End is split) and out to the sideline on each side of the ball.

**GAP** – The area between each Offensive Lineman in any given formation. Gaps are lettered in succession in relation to their distance from the center; for example, the area between the Center and each Guard is the “A” gap and the area between the Guards and the Tackles is the “B” gap.

**LOS** – This stands for Line of Scrimmage and is the imaginary line that runs from the football to each sideline.

**MAN TO MAN** – Coverage which isolates a defender on a receiver.

**MOTION** – Pre-snap movement by a receiver or Running Back.

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# **Glossary** *(Cont'd)*

**POINT OF ATTACK** – *The specific hole or gap that the ball is designed to go to. If a dive play has been called for the “A” gap then the “A” gap is the Point of Attack. Offensive Linemen must understand where the Point of Attack is to properly apply their blocking rules.*

**PRE-SNAP** – *Describes the formation and motions that occur prior to the snap of the ball.*

**PRESS** – *An alignment which places a defender directly in front of a wide receiver to hold up, delay, or redirect his movement off of the LOS.*

**PURSUIT** – *The angles taken by defenders to cut off or track the ball carrier.*

**RED ZONE** – *The area between the 20 yard line and the goal line.*

**REVERSE** – *An offensive play in which the ball begins in one direction, is transferred to another player, and comes back in the opposite direction.*

**STRONG SIDE** – *Generally the side of the offense with two receivers or a single Tight End.*

**STUNTS** – *Describes the coordinated movement of the Defensive Line and the Linebackers as they attack gaps.*

**UNBALANCED** – *When the offensive formation puts four linemen on one side of the Center.*

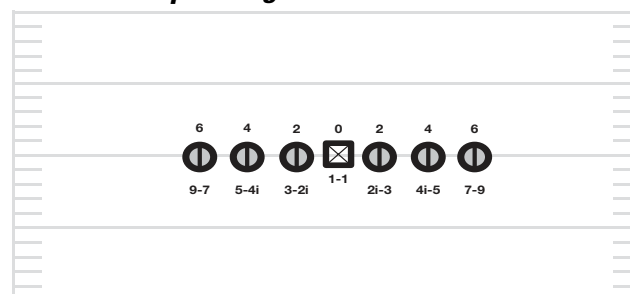
**WEAK SIDE** – *The side of the football opposite the Strong Side.*

**ZONE** – *An area of the field covered by a single defensive player.*

# Line Techniques

To improve communication and ensure proper alignment for the defensive line it is best to employ the numbered technique system. Introduce this system early in the pre-season and drill it everyday you work on defense. Even the youngest players will understand the system's concepts after only a few practices. When aligning players in practice, during drills or scrimmages, always use numbered line calls to instill the system within them. It is important to note that there is no left or right to the system - the numbers remain consistent on each side of the ball.

**Line Technique Diagram**



- 0 Technique** – Head up alignment over the Center
- 1 Technique** – Shaded, splitting the middle of the Center with the inside foot
- 2 Technique** – Head up alignment over the Guard
- 2i Technique** – Shaded defender aligned on the inside eye of the Guard, outside foot splitting the middle of the Guard
- 3 Technique** – Outside shade of the Guard, splitting the middle with the inside foot
- 4 Technique** – Head up alignment on the Tackle
- 4i Technique** – Shaded defender aligned on the inside eye of the Tackle, outside foot splitting the middle of the Tackle
- 5 Technique** – Outside shade of the Tackle, splitting the middle of the Tackle with the inside foot
- 6 Technique** – Head up alignment over the Tight End
- 7 Technique** – Shaded defender aligned on the inside eye of the Tight End, outside foot splitting the middle of the Tight End
- 9 Technique** – Outside shade of the Tight End, splitting the middle with the inside foot

# The 4-4 Defense

The 4-4 defense is an excellent base defensive scheme to teach young players for many reasons. First and foremost it is an easy to learn defensive concept that puts players in positions to be successful. You want young players to make plays, and making plays on defense gives them the positive reinforcement that develops confidence and encourages them to continue playing the game. The 4-4 does not require players to have a lot of reads or keys; you can simply line them up, send them through gaps, and watch them make tackles.

**RUN STOPPING DEFENSE:** Because of the timing and skill sets required to develop a passing game at the youth level you will find that most youth offenses are run oriented. By placing eight players in the box, the 4-4 defense makes it very difficult for offenses to consistently run the football. The blitz combinations available out of the 4-4 also create confusion for the offensive linemen and the backs as to whom to block on any given play. By stopping the running attack of an offense, the 4-4 defense may force an offense into passing the football, taking them out of their comfort zone and reducing their chance of success.

**EASY TO TEACH:** The eight defensive players in the box have simple rules that apply to their positions, making the 4-4 an easy defensive scheme to teach. You will find that your young players will become faster and more aggressive with a less cerebral defensive scheme. A few assignments may need to adjust against offensive formations, but for the most part all eleven defensive players will enjoy a straight-forward approach.

**FLEXIBLE:** While the 4-4 defense is an excellent base scheme, it is unlikely the only scheme you will need to run to be successful. We recognize that in a seven game season you will see more than one type of offense, so it's important that your defense be able to adjust to various formations and schemes. Starting with a 4-4 base scheme makes it easy to adjust into a variety of other defenses with minimal rule changes and adjustments. We will show some of those in this playbook including; a 4-5 look, a 6-2 look, and adjustments against multiple receiver sets.

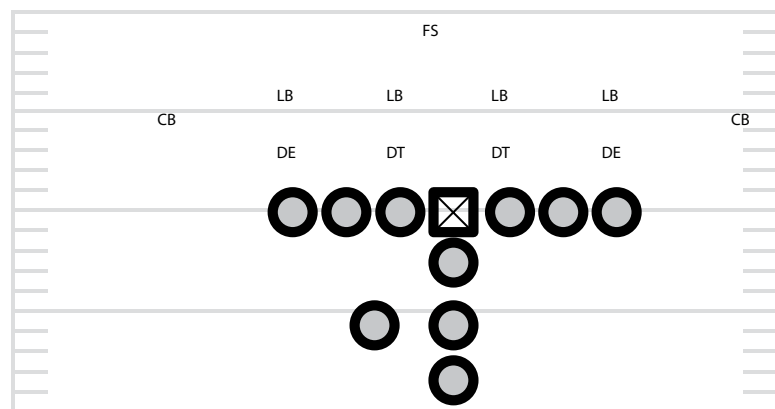
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# The 4-4 Defense *(Cont'd)*

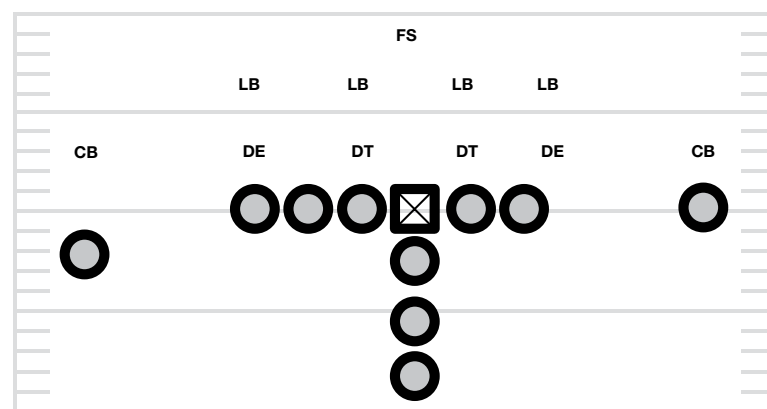
**HARD TO BLOCK:** The 4-4 creates confusion for young offensive linemen; confusion creates slow play and slow play stifles offensive success. By sending eight defensive players through various gaps, the offensive linemen never get comfortable. The 4-4 also limits the ability of the offensive linemen to pull, trap, and double team block.

**FUN TO PLAY:** Playing football should be fun, and kids have fun when they're successful. The 4-4 defense promotes success and fun by moving defenders downhill, allowing them to fly to the ball, make tackles and create turnovers. This kind of success makes playing defense fun for the entire team.

## *Base 4-4 vs. No Flanker*



## *Base 4-4 vs. Pro Set*





# Defensive Line Play

The front four linemen in the 4-4 defense set the tone for the aggressive and quick play that the scheme requires for success. They must always get off the ball very quickly and hit their gaps square, prepared to find the football and make a play. The defensive linemen should never think they have to take on blocks and defeat them, instead they should defeat blocks with quickness and change the Line of Scrimmage by getting out of their stance and into the gaps.

## DEFENSIVE TACKLE

**STANCE:** 3 or 4 point stance. The 4 point stance may be better for younger players to maintain balance and gap-shooting ability. When using the 3 point stance the outside arm should be the one on the ground.

**TECHNIQUE ALIGNMENT:** Both Defensive Tackles should line up in a 2 technique, with their nose on the Guard's nose. Their eyes should be focused straight ahead with the ability to see the ball snap. Never tip which gap you are shooting by leaning or shading one side of the Guard's body.

**FIRST STEPS:** Always take a first, directional step with the foot closest to the gap assignment followed by a quick second step with the opposite foot that gets you square in the gap. Pad level is very important to maintaining a good breakdown position and being quick off the ball. If the Defensive Tackles are unable to get into the gap quickly, chances are they are rising up out of their stance before moving forward. Stay low and move forward.

## DEFENSIVE END

**STANCE:** 2, 3 or 4 point stance. The 4 point stance may be better for younger players to maintain balance and gap-shooting ability. When using the 3 point stance, the outside arm should be the one on the ground. The 2 point stance, with the outside foot slightly back, is recommended only when offenses are throwing a lot of quick passes or trying to run outside. The 2 point stance allows the Defensive End to quickly get his hands up in the passing lanes or into the backfield to defend sweeps and pitches.

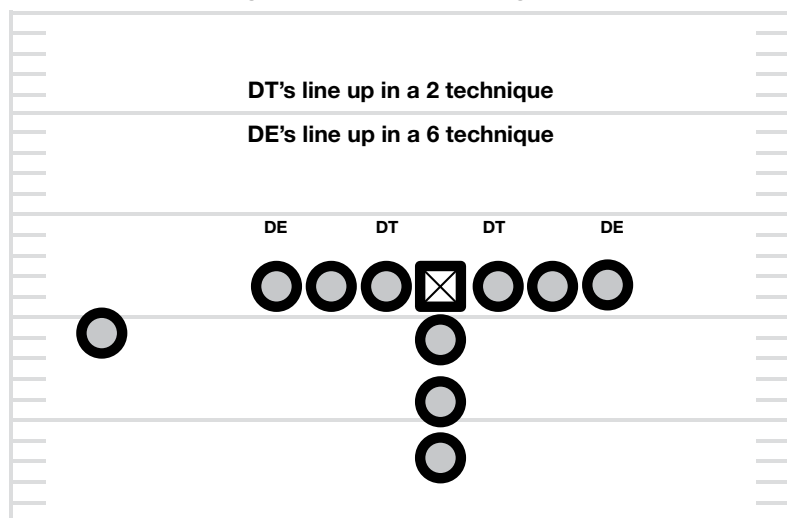
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# Defensive Line Play *(Cont'd)*

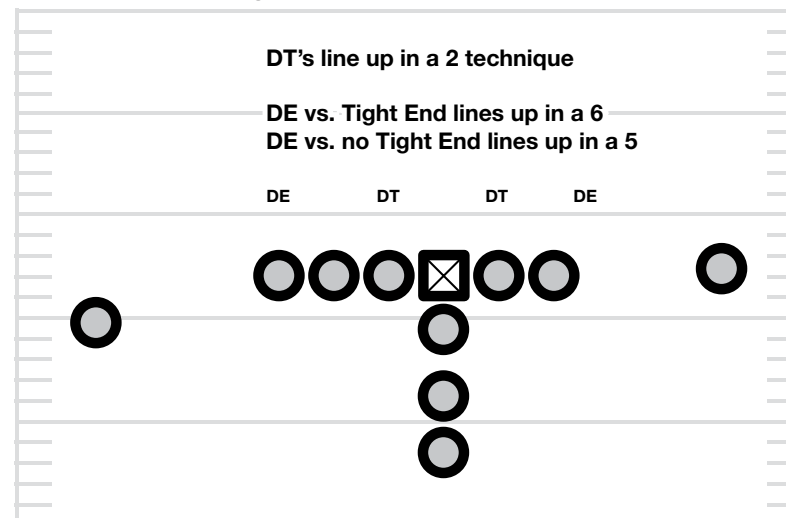
**TECHNIQUE ALIGNMENT:** The Defensive Ends will almost always line up in a 6 technique, head up on the Tight End. If the formation does not present a Tight End the Defensive End should slide down into a 5 technique just outside of the Offensive Tackle.

**FIRST STEPS:** Always take a first, directional step with the foot closest to the gap assignment followed by a quick second step with the opposite foot that gets you square in the gap. Attack the shoulder of Tight End in the assigned gap; disallowing a free release will hinder the Tight End's ability to catch a dump pass or run a well-timed deeper route.

## Defensive Line Alignment vs. Double Tight



## Defensive Line Alignment vs. Pro Set



# Linebacker Play

The Linebackers in the 4-4 defense need to be able to make the tough plays between the tackles, run the ball down on the outside, and defend against the pass. Above all else, these players need to be excellent tacklers. The blitz scheme will put them in one on one situations with the ball carrier and they must be able to make those tackles. Quickness and relentless pursuit of the ball are other key factors to excellent Linebacker play in the 4-4. The outside Linebackers in the 4-4 should be quicker and faster than the inside Linebackers, who are typically a little bigger and stronger. They must take charge in working with the Defensive Lineman they are paired with, always communicating assignments to ensure that they don't both end up in the same gap, thus leaving a gap uncovered. Finally, they must recognize changes in offensive formations such as slot players, multiple receiver sets, or an unbalanced offensive line.

## INSIDE LINEBACKERS

**STANCE:** 2 point stance. Weight should be on the balls of the feet to promote a downhill mentality; these players should be moving towards the ball on the snap. The knees should be bent, hands out in front, eyes on nearest offensive back. Do not stagger the feet, toes should be square.

**ALIGNMENT:** Stacked square behind the Defensive Tackle on his side. In his 2 point stance his hands should be able to reach out and touch the hips of the down lineman in front of him.

**FIRST STEPS:** If a stunt is called, the Linebacker must take a first directional step with the foot closest to his gap assignment followed by quick power steps into the gap. Get square, maintain a low pad level and be prepared to take on lead blockers or a ball carrier. If no stunt is called, step to the "B" gap and read the back on his side of the football, determine the point of attack and flow to it.

## OUTSIDE LINEBACKERS

**STANCE:** 2 point stance. Weight should be on the balls of the feet to promote a downhill mentality; these players should be moving towards the ball on the snap. The knees should be bent, hands out in front, eyes on nearest offensive back. Do not stagger the feet, toes should be square.

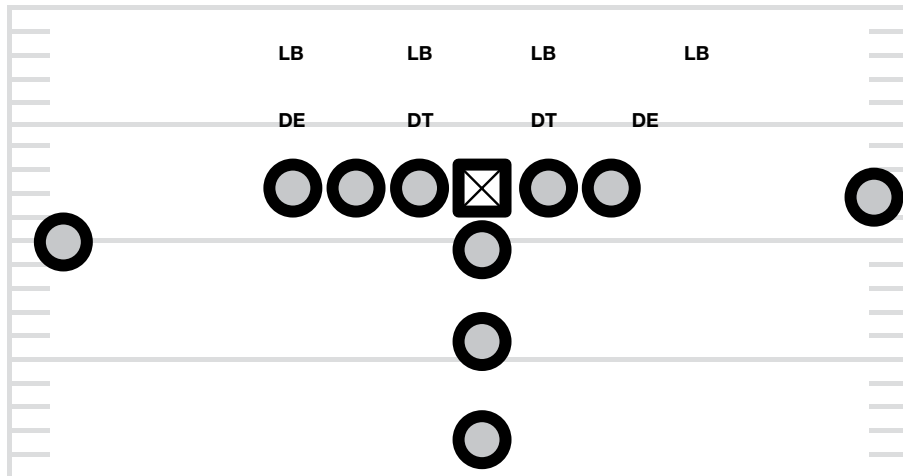
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## Linebacker Play (Cont'd)

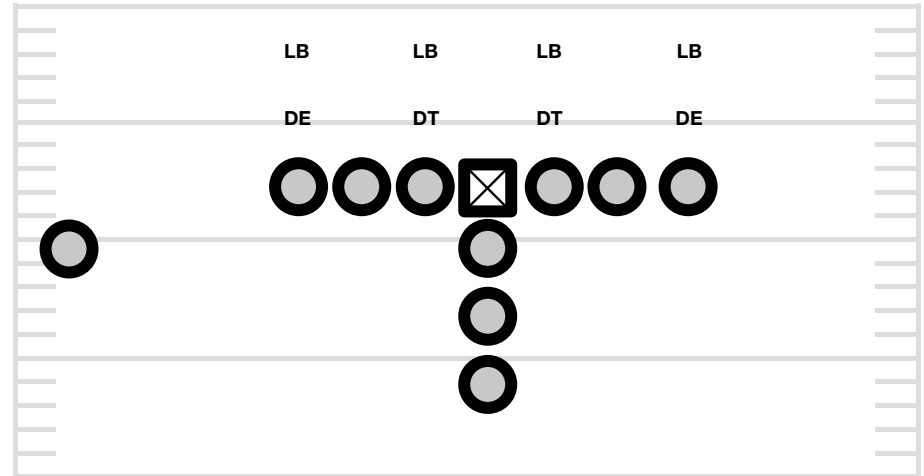
**TECHNIQUE ALIGNMENT:** Typically stacked behind the Defensive End they are paired with, however if there is no Tight End and the Defensive End has moved to a 5 technique, we may adjust the Outside Linebacker to account for a slot player (see the formation adjustments on page 28).

**FIRST STEPS:** If a stunt is called the Linebacker must take a directional step with the foot closest to his gap assignment and then take quick power steps into the gap. Get square, maintain a low pad level, and be prepared to take on lead blockers or a ball carrier. If no stunt is called then step to the “D” gap and read the back on his side of the football to determine the point of attack. If the ball is going away, stay home for any bootleg, counter, or reverse.

## Linebacker Alignment vs. Pro Set



### ***Linebacker Alignment vs. Double Tight***



# ***Defensive Back Play***

In the base 4-4 scheme we expect our defensive backs to think pass first and run support second. When the offensive formation presents only one Split End or Flanker to their side, the Cornerbacks will have those players in a man to man technique, (we will cover zone assignments on page 36). If there is no offensive player outside the box, the Cornerbacks will check Tight End and near back for any quick passes or swings out of the backfield. The Safety is just that, no Offensive Player should ever get behind the Safety, he thinks pass first and second and only comes up to support the run when the ball crosses the Line of Scrimmage.

## **CORNERBACK**

**STANCE:** 2 point stance. Weight should be even over the feet, outside leg slightly back, knees bent, hands out in front, eyes on keys.

**ALIGNMENT:** Vs. Wide Receiver: Adjust the depth off the Line of Scrimmage according to the speed of the Offensive player and the down and distance. There is no need to press the coverage on a 3rd and 10. Vs. No Wide Receiver: Set up 3 yards outside the Tight End and 3 yards off the Line of Scrimmage.

**FIRST STEPS:** Take two "read steps" backwards and focus on the football. Is the Quarterback showing run or pass? As long as the ball is going backwards from the Line of Scrimmage think pass. Cover the assigned receiver and follow the football with your eyes. Once you see run, if the ball is coming towards you, squeeze down maintaining outside leverage. If the ball is going away take a wide pursuit angle as you may be the last defender able to stop a score.



# Defensive Back Play (Cont'd)

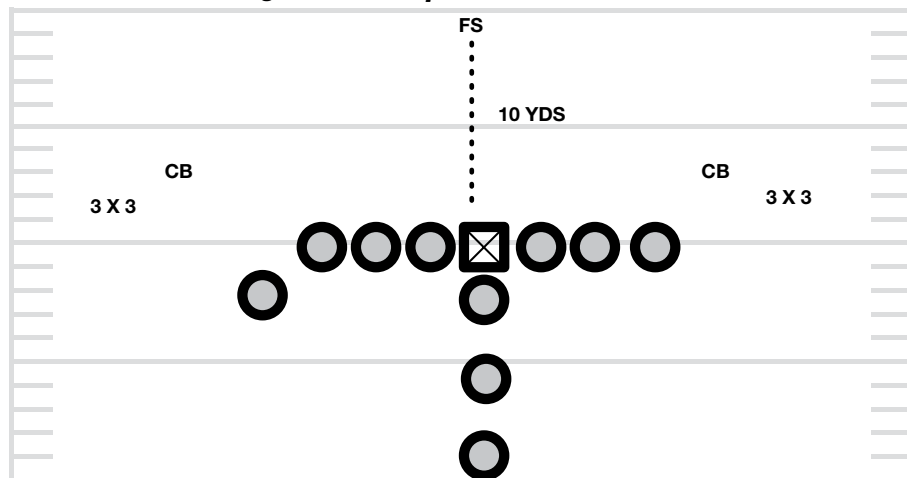
## SAFETY

**STANCE:** 2 point stance. Weight should be evenly distributed over the feet, stand more upright than the Linebackers with eyes on the Quarterback.

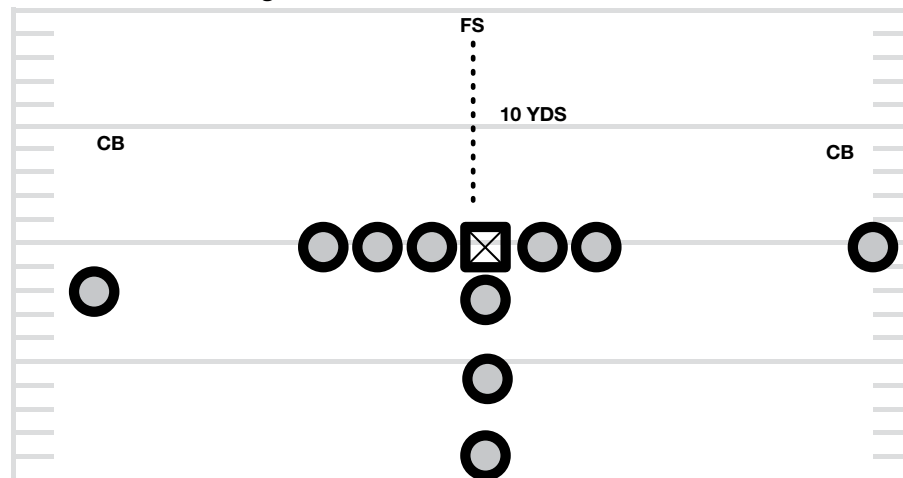
**TECHNIQUE ALIGNMENT:** Safety alignment should be 10 yards from the ball and centered over the football, or slightly towards the wide side of the field when the ball is on the hash mark.

**FIRST STEPS:** Take two “read steps” backwards and focus on the football. Is the Quarterback showing run or pass? As long as the ball is going backwards from the line of scrimmage think pass. Check the Tight End or backs coming out of the backfield; provide deep support and watch the football and the eyes of the offensive player.

### ***Defensive Back Alignment No Splits***



## Defensive Back Alignment vs. Pro Set



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# The Front 8

The 4-4 Defense is a great run stopping defense because it starts with 8 defensive players in the box. Because of the various stunts and blitzes available out of the 4-4, the Offensive Linemen are often confused as to whom to block on any given play. To better ensure that every gap is covered on every play, partner each Defensive Linemen with a Linebacker and have them communicate and work together on every play. Require that the players communicate prior to every play. Use a simple numbering system to make communication and verbiage simple for the defensive pairs. Number the pairs 1 through 4 across the Defense from left to right so the Left Defensive End and the Left Outside Linebacker are 1, the Left Defensive Tackle and Left Inside Linebacker are 2, the Right Defensive Tackle and Right Inside Linebacker are 3 and the Right Defensive End and the Right Outside Linebacker are 4.

## **PAIR #1: Left Outside Linebacker and Left Defensive End**

Since most offenses are typically right handed, meaning they will run to the right more than to the left, put the most athletic Linebacker on the Left Outside, in pair number 1. Pair this Linebacker with the bigger and stronger of the two Defensive Ends.

## **PAIR #2: Left Inside Linebacker and Left Defensive Tackle**

The Left Inside Linebacker should be the bigger and stronger of the two inside players, and while we want all defenders to be able to run, a smart player that is a solid tackler can afford to be a step slower. The Defensive Tackles on both sides have to be tough and quick off the ball on every snap.

## **PAIR #3: Right Inside Linebacker and Right Defensive Tackle**

The Right Inside Linebacker, like the #2 Linebacker, needs to be smart and a solid tackler. The Inside Linebackers will often have to take on lead blockers out of the backfield; so they'll need to step up and take on blocks in the hole so the ball carrier does not have open space in which to run. The #2 and #3 pairs must dominate the "A" and "B" gaps on both sides of the ball.

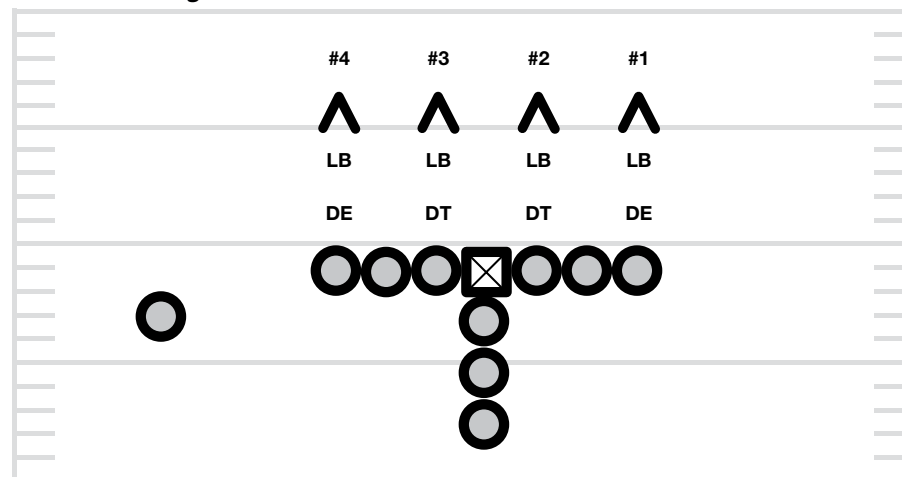
## **PAIR #4: Right Outside Linebacker and Right Defensive End**

The Right Outside Linebacker must be athletic and smart enough to recognize bootlegs, counter plays, and reverses that may come back at him. Since the majority of Quarterbacks are right handed, #4 players must have the ability to get to the QB on pass plays.

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# The Front 8 *(Cont'd)*

**Front 8 Pairings**



# The X Stunt

The Base 4-4 offers two basic stunt or blitz calls for the Linebackers. It is important to note that the stunt calls are for the Linebackers; therefore, the Linemen that are paired with the Linebackers must go to the opposite gap. Stunts should always be a focus in practice. The X Stunt is an outside gap blitz, calling for the Linebackers to explode through the outside gap while their partner on the Defensive Line attacks the inside gap. For example, if the call is for a 2 & 3 X, then the Tackles shoot the “A” gap and the Inside Linebackers shoot the “B” gap.

## ALL X STUNT ASSIGNMENTS:

**Left Defensive End** – Line up in 6 technique and explode through the “C” gap, attacking the inside shoulder of the Tight End

**Left Defensive Tackle** – Line up in a 2 technique and explode through the “A” gap, get square and find the football

**Right Defensive Tackle** – Line up in a 2 technique and explode through the “A” gap, get square and find the football

**Right Defensive End** – Line up in 6 technique and explode through the “C” gap, attacking the inside shoulder of the Tight End

**Left Outside Linebacker (1)** – Stack behind D. End and attack the outside shoulder of the Tight End, look for ball coming at you and attack. If ball goes away stay home for BCR

**Left Inside Linebacker (2)** – Stack behind D. Tackle and attack the “B” gap, low pad level and drive through any lead blocks, find and tackle the football

**Right Inside Linebacker (3)** – Stack behind D. Tackle and attack the “B” gap, low pad level and drive through any lead blocks, find and tackle the football

**Right Outside Linebacker (4)** – Stack behind D. End and attack the outside shoulder of the Tight End, look for ball coming at you and attack. If ball goes away stay home for BCR

**Left Cornerback** – If no wide offensive player line up 3 x 3 and play contain on the edge, checking for dump or swing pass

**Right Cornerback** – If no wide offensive player, line up 3 x 3 and play contain on the edge, checking for dump or swing pass

**Safety** – Line up 10 yards from the ball, centered. Read the QB while checking for a quick release by the Tight Ends. Read pass first and second. Support run as a third option

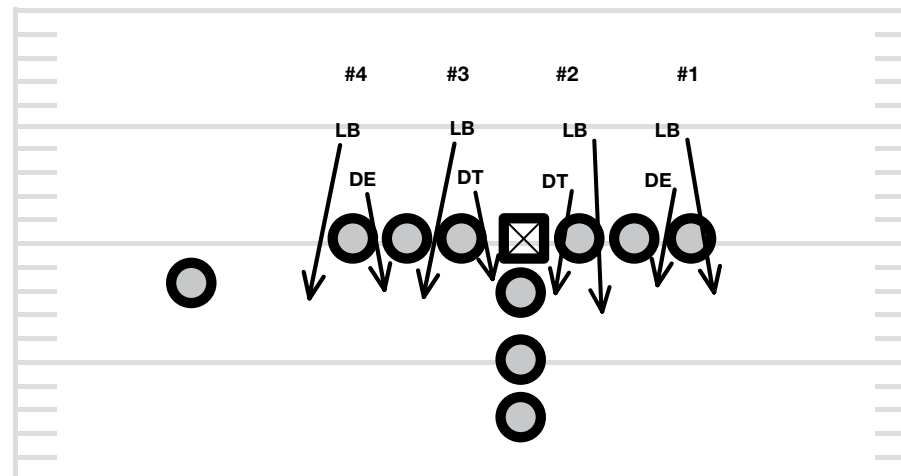
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# The X Stunt (Cont'd)

## COACHING POINTS:

- ✓ Ensure that the LB pairs can reach out and touch the hip of the down Lineman in front of them. The stack should be tight!
- ✓ Communication: all Linebackers should tell their partner which gap they are attacking so the Linemen know to attack the opposite gap.
- ✓ The Inside Players should be quick and avoid contact with the Offensive Linemen without going wide and opening a large gap. They should always be square as they explode through the gap.
- ✓ The Outside Players should make contact with the eligible receivers (usually Tight Ends) to prevent a free release.

### 4-4 All X Stunt





# The Y Stunt

The Base 4-4 provides two basic stunt or blitz calls for the Linebackers. It is important to note that the stunt calls are for the Linebackers; therefore, the Linemen that are paired with the Linebackers should go to the opposite gap. Stunts should always be a focus in practice. The Y Stunt is an inside gap blitz, calling for the Linebackers to explode through the inside gap while their partner on the Defensive Line attacks the outside gap. For example, if the call is for a 2 & 3 Y, the Tackles shoot the "B" gap and the Linebackers shoot the "A" gap.

## ALL Y STUNT ASSIGNMENTS:

**Left Defensive End** – Line up in a 6 technique and explode to the "D" gap, attacking the outside shoulder of the Tight End, look for ball coming at you and attack. If ball goes away stay home for BCR

**Left Defensive Tackle** – Line up in a 2 technique and explode through the "B" gap, get square and find the football

**Right Defensive Tackle** – Line up in a 2 technique and explode through the "B" gap, get square and find the football

**Right Defensive End** – Line up in a 6 technique and explode to the "D" gap, attacking the outside shoulder of the Tight End, look for ball coming at you and attack. If ball goes away stay home for BCR

**Left Outside Linebacker (1)** – Stack behind D. End and attack the "C" gap and the inside shoulder of the Tight End, find the football

**Left Inside Linebacker (2)** – Stack behind D. Tackle and attack the "A" gap, low pad level and drive through any lead blocks, find and tackle the football

**Right Inside Linebacker (3)** – Stack behind D. Tackle and attack the "A" gap, low pad level and drive through any lead blocks, find and tackle the football

**Right Outside Linebacker (4)** – Stack behind D. End and attack the "C" gap and the inside shoulder of the Tight End, find the football

**Left Cornerback** – If no wide offensive player, line up 3 x 3 and play contain on the edge, checking for dump or swing pass

**Right Cornerback** – If no wide offensive player, line up 3 x 3 and play contain on the edge, checking for dump or swing pass

**Safety** – Line up 10 yards from the ball, centered. Read the QB while checking for a quick release by the Tight Ends. Read pass first and second. Support run as a third option

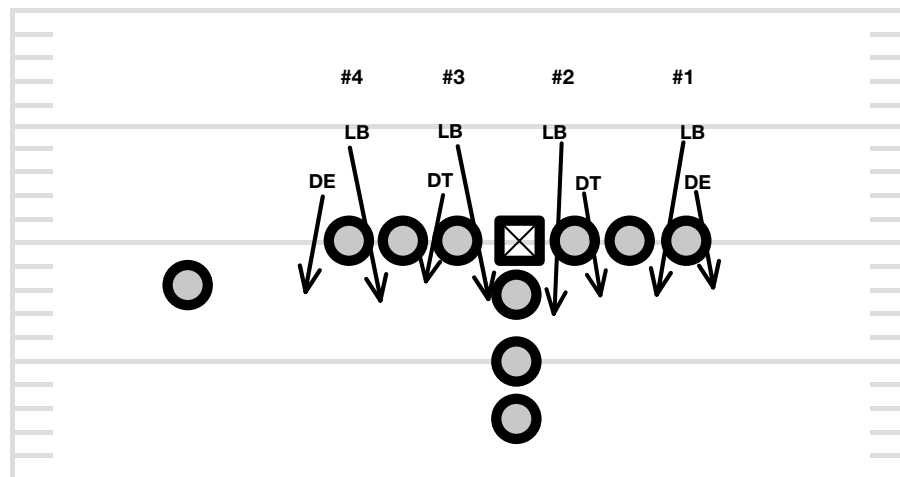
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# The Y Stunt (Cont'd)

## COACHING POINTS:

- ✓ Ensure that the LB pairs can reach out and touch the hip of the down Linemen in front of them.  
The stack should be tight!
- ✓ Communication: all Linebackers should tell their partner which gap they are attacking so the Linemen know to attack the the opposite gap.
- ✓ The Inside Players should be quick and avoid contact with the Offensive Linemen without going wide and opening up a large gap. They should always be square as they explode through the gap.
- ✓ The Outside Players should make contact with the eligible receivers (usually Tight Ends) to prevent a free release.

### 4-4 All Y Stunt



# Combination Stunts

The 4-4 does not require that you blitz all four Linebackers on every play, or that all four must stunt either X or Y at the same time. What makes the 4-4 so difficult to block is the use of combination stunts, where on a given play the defense uses a combination of X and Y stunts or only sends 1 or 2 Linebackers. This is an effective defensive wrinkle to use when offenses attempt to double team and lead block. For example, while a lead blocker is focused on a non-blitzing Linebacker, a backside Linebacker can run free to the football.

## COMBINATION STUNT 2 X 3 & 4 Y ASSIGNMENTS:

**Left Defensive End** – Line up in a 6 technique, attack the inside half of the Tight End and own the “C” gap

**Left Defensive Tackle** – Line up in a 2 technique and explode through the “A” gap, get square and find the football

**Right Defensive Tackle** – Line up in a 2 technique and explode through the “B” gap, get square and find the football

**Right Defensive End** – Line up in a 6 technique and explode to the “D” gap, attacking the outside shoulder of the Tight End, look for ball coming at you and attack. If ball goes away stay home for BCR

**Left Outside Linebacker (1)** – Stack behind D. End and step to the “D” gap, reading the near back. If ball is coming at you step up and attack it, if ball flows away play for BCR

**Left Inside Linebacker (2)** – Stack behind D. Tackle and attack the “B” gap, low pad level and drive through any lead blocks, find and tackle the football

**Right Inside Linebacker (3)** – Stack behind D. Tackle and attack the “A” gap, low pad level and drive through any lead blocks, find and tackle the football

**Right Outside Linebacker (4)** – Stack behind D. End and attack the “C” gap and the inside shoulder of the Tight End, find the football

**Left Cornerback** – If no wide offensive player, line up 3 x 3 and play contain on the edge, checking for dump or swing pass

**Right Cornerback** – If no wide offensive player, line up 3 x 3 and play contain on the edge, checking for dump or swing pass

**Safety** – Line up 10 yards from the ball, centered. Read the QB while checking for a quick release by the Tight Ends. Read pass first and second. Support run as a third option

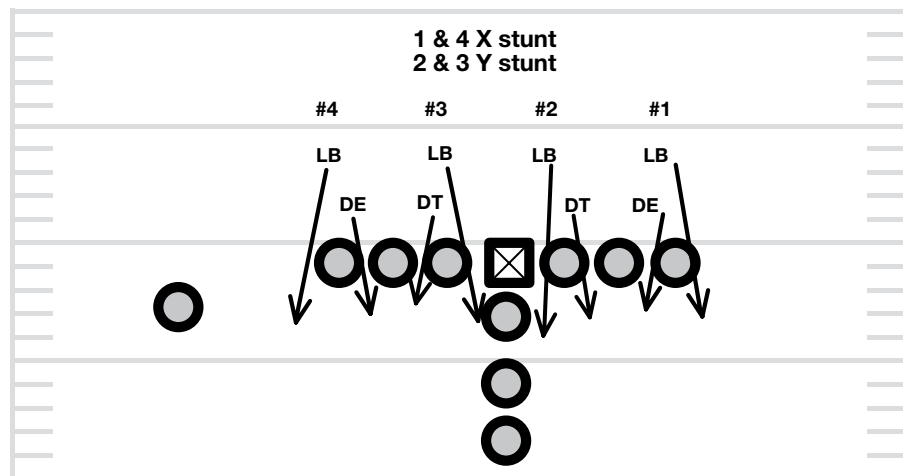
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# Combination Stunts (Cont'd)

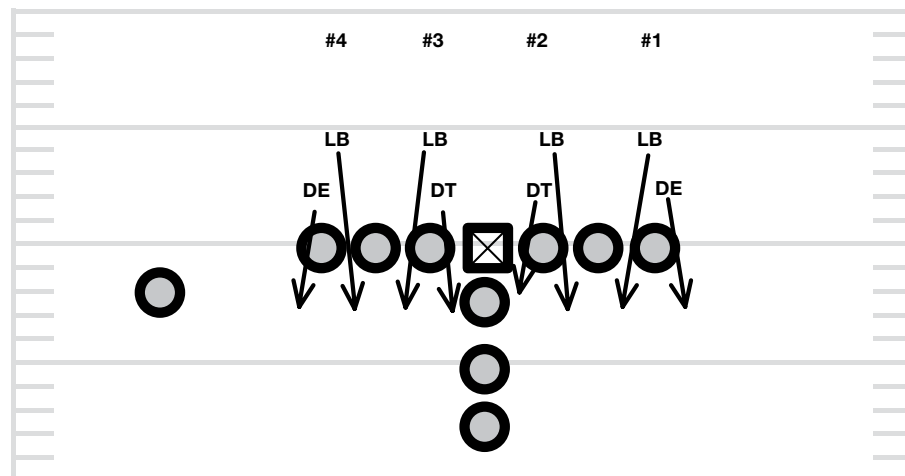
## COACHING POINTS:

- ✓ Ensure that the LB pairs can reach out and touch the hip of the down Lineman in front of them. The stack should be tight!
- ✓ There should be no difference in the pre-snap look from the blitzing and non-blitzing Linebackers.
- ✓ Communication: all Linebackers should tell their partner which gap to attack so the Lineman knows to attack the opposite gap.
- ✓ The inside players involved in a stunt should be quick and avoid contact with the Offensive Linemen without going wide and opening up a large gap. If an inside stunt is not called, the Defensive Linemen must attack the inside half of the Offensive Linemen.
- ✓ The Outside Players should make contact with the eligible receivers (usually Tight Ends) to prevent a free release.

**4-4 Combination Stunt: 1 and 4 X 2 and 3 Y**



**Combination Stunt: 1 and 4 Y 2 and 3 X**



# Formation Adjustments

The Base 4-4 presents eight defensive players in the box, which gives the defense a personnel advantage if an offense runs a pro set formation with a Split End to one side of the ball and a Flanker to the other. To combat this, offenses will utilize slot players to draw defenders out of the box. It is important to scout your opponents and understand what formations they are likely to run and the plays they will utilize out of those sets. Prepare your players for the adjustments that must be made to match up against those formations.

It is important to understand the passing limitations of younger players. Younger Quarterbacks do not have strong enough arms to throw the ball far downfield, young Linemen are not able to protect for a long time, and sometimes catching a pass can be a challenge. The 4-4 is designed to defend the pass with great pressure on the Quarterback; therefore, when formations attempt to spread out the 4-4, it is recommended that you press cover the receivers, take away quick passing routes and send as many Linebackers as you can to get after the Quarterback.

## **PRO-SET WITH A SLOT**

In a traditional Pro-Set formation the Cornerbacks have the #1 receiver on each side of the ball, which is the widest receiver by formation. If the offense brings a back out of the backfield and lines him up in a slot, you have a couple of options. If it is not a short yardage play in the red zone, move the outside Linebacker off his stack and line him up on the inside of the slot player to take away the slant or dump (figure 1). If it is a short yardage play in the red zone, move the Safety over to play the slot, keep your 4-4 stack intact and send everyone except the outside Linebacker over the Tight End (figure 2).

## **SPREAD FORMATION**

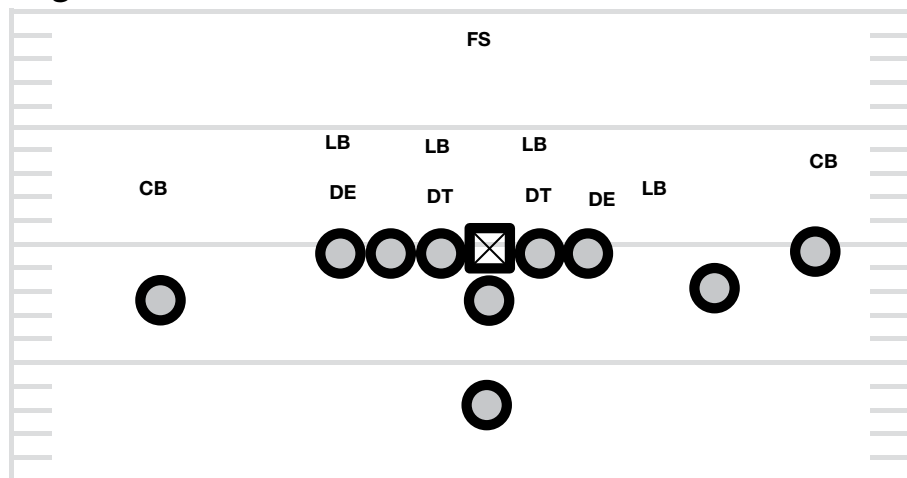
In a traditional Spread Formation, with two receivers spread out on each side of the ball and one back in the backfield, it is best to slide the outside Linebackers out and away from the stack and align them on the inside of the slot or #2 receivers to take away the quick pass. Slide the Defensive Ends down to a 5 technique and send both of them after the Quarterback to force an early throw. If one of the slots goes in motion, the Linebacker must run with him to the other side. Going into a cover 3 out of this set is an easy adjustment to make, however, it is likely unnecessary against younger players.

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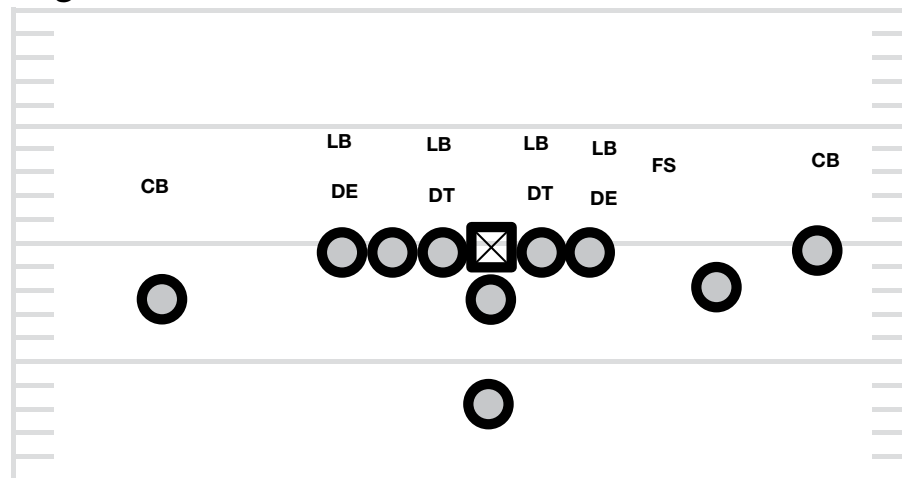


# Formation Adjustments *(Cont'd)*

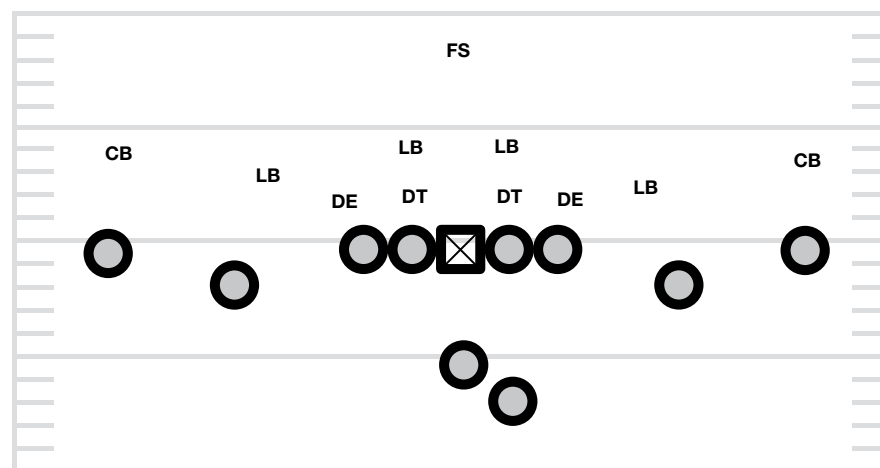
**(Figure 1) 4-4 vs. Pro Set with a Slot**



**(Figure 2) Red Zone 4-4 vs. Pro Set with a Slot**



**4-4 vs. Spread**



# The 45 Adjustment

The 45 adjustment out of the base 4-4 is an excellent wrinkle to utilize on first down or when coming out of a time out when the threat of passing the ball downfield is minimal. You can switch to the 45 without changing personnel by bringing the Free Safety up to the LOS, however, it makes better sense to take your best Inside Linebacker and place him in the 5 spot and bring another Inside Linebacker into the game to take his spot at either the 2 or 3 Linebacker spot. If you have scouted your opponent and have a strong feeling about what hole they tend to attack on first down, the extra Linebacker can run free to that spot and create problems for the blocking scheme. The two Defensive Tackles should drive their Offensive Guards into the gap they are shooting to create a bigger seam for the blitzing Linebackers.

## 45 1 & 4 X 2 & 3 Y ASSIGNMENTS:

**Left Defensive End** – Line up in 6 technique and explode through the “C” gap, attacking the inside shoulder of the Tight End

**Left Defensive Tackle** – Line up in a 2 technique and drive the Guard into the “B” gap. Penetrate and find the football

**Right Defensive Tackle** Line up in a 2 technique and drive the Guard into the “B” gap. Penetrate and find the football

**Right Defensive End** – Line up in 6 technique and explode through the “C” gap, attacking the inside shoulder of the Tight End

**Left Outside Linebacker (1)** – Stack behind D. End and attack the outside shoulder of the Tight End, look for ball coming at you and attack. If ball goes away stay home for BCR

**Left Inside Linebacker (2)** – Stack behind D. Tackle and attack the “A” gap, low pad level and drive through any lead blocks, find and tackle the football

**Right Inside Linebacker (3)** – Stack behind D. Tackle and attack the “A” gap, low pad level and drive through any lead blocks, find and tackle the football

**Right Outside Linebacker (4)** – Stack behind D. End and attack the outside shoulder of the Tight End, look for ball coming at you and attack. If ball goes away stay home for BCR

**Left Cornerback** – If no wide offensive player, line up 3 x 3 and play contain on the edge, checking for dump or swing pass

**Right Cornerback** – If no wide offensive player, line up 3 x 3 and play contain on the edge, checking for dump or swing pass

**#5 Middle Linebacker** – Line up about a yard deeper than the stacked Linebackers and read the flow of the backfield to find the football. Explode through the gap and tackle the ball

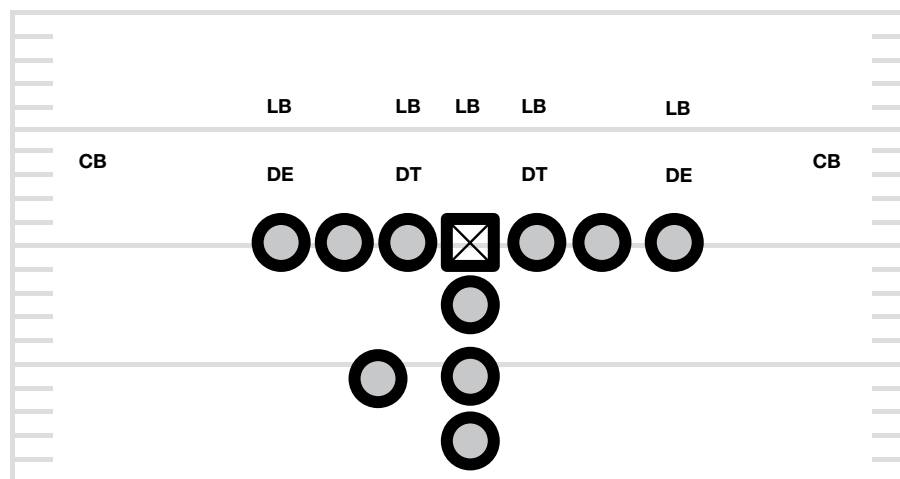
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# The 45 Adjustment *(Cont'd)*

## COACHING POINTS:

- ✓ If calling an inside Y stunt, the 2 & 3 Linebackers can step up pre-snap and show they are coming. Offensive Linemen and the Quarterback will be slower coming out of the snap.
- ✓ This is a run stopping blitz, the Tight Ends cannot get a free release off the line and the front eight must get to the Quarterback.
- ✓ The Defensive Tackles must be quick in order to drive the Guards into the backfield and own the gap.

**Base 45 Defense**



# The 6-2 Adjustment

The 6-2 adjustment out of the base 4-4 is an excellent defense to utilize on short yardage or goal line situations. Essentially, the 6-2 breaks the stack of the outside Linebackers and brings them up to the LOS, while the Ends slide down closer to the ball. You still have the option of using X or Y stunts with the inside Linebackers, however, the rules for the other players change. The Defensive Ends slide down to a 5 technique, shade the outside of the Offensive Tackle, and play in a 3 or 4 point stance. Outside Linebackers (1 & 4) step up and play a 9 technique, shading the outside of the Tight End in a 2 point stance with their outside foot back.

## 6-2 NO STUNTS ASSIGNMENTS:

**Left Defensive End** – Line up in a 5 technique and explode through the O. Tackle and into the backfield. Find the football

**Left Defensive Tackle** – Line up in a 2 technique and drive through the Guard into the “A” gap. Penetrate and find the football

**Right Defensive Tackle** – Line up in a 2 technique and drive through the Guard into the “A” gap. Penetrate and find the football

**Right Defensive End** – Line up in a 5 technique and explode through the O. Tackle and into the backfield. Find the football

**Left Outside Linebacker (1)** – Line up in a 9 technique and deliver a blow to the Tight End to prevent a free release. Look for ball coming at you and attack. If ball goes away stay home for BCR

**Left Inside Linebacker (2)** – Stack behind the Defensive Tackle and step to the “B” gap on the snap, read the near back, flow to and tackle the football

**Right Inside Linebacker (3)** – Stack behind the Defensive Tackle and step to the “B” gap on the snap, read the near back, flow to and tackle the football

**Right Outside Linebacker (4)** – Line up in a 9 technique and deliver a blow to the Tight End to prevent a free release. Look for ball coming at you and attack. If ball goes away stay home for BCR

**Left Cornerback** – If no wide offensive player, line up 3 x 3 and play contain on the edge, checking for dump or swing pass

**Right Cornerback** – If no wide offensive player, line up 3 x 3 and play contain on the edge, checking for dump or swing pass

**Safety** – Line up 10 yards from the ball, centered. Read the QB while checking for a quick release by the Tight Ends. Read pass first and second. Support run as a third option

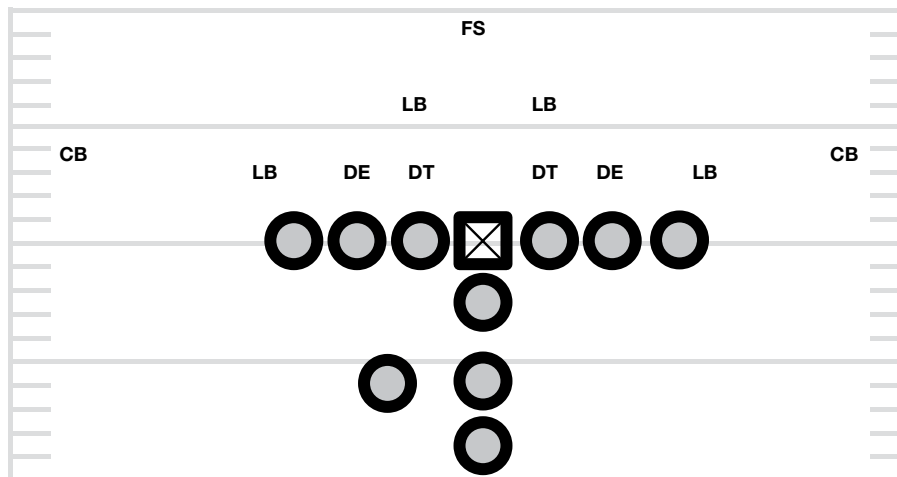
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# The 6-2 Adjustment *(Cont'd)*

## COACHING POINTS:

- ✓ This is a great down and distance defense, use it on 3<sup>rd</sup> down and short or on the goal line to get more defenders on the LOS.
- ✓ Ensure that the Tackles and Ends drive through the Offensive Linemen to prevent them from blocking the Linebackers.
- ✓ The Outside Linebackers must deliver a blow with their hands to knock the Tight End off balance and prevent a free release.

**Base 62**



# Man Coverage

The Base 4-4 is designed to stop the run, and when teams have little or no success moving the football on the ground they will turn to the pass. There are many ways in which the 4-4 can be successful against the pass. First and foremost, if stunts are called and the defense is sending Linebackers through the gaps, there will be tremendous pressure on the passer to get rid of the ball. Defending the pass with pressure on the Quarterback is a key element to the design of the 4-4, and another reason why all of the front eight defenders must be quick and aggressive on every snap. Secondly, in Man coverage the Cornerbacks will use a press coverage – depending on down and distance – and take away quick pass routes such as the hitch, slant, and dump. Pressure from the front eight and pressure coverage from the Cornerbacks will transform the 4-4 defense from a solid run stopping scheme to a balanced scheme against any offensive approach.

## Cornerback Play

For Cornerbacks, the key to solid coverage alignments against a wide player begins with the scouting of your opponent. The Defensive Coaches must understand how strong the Quarterback's arm is, how fast the receivers are, and what routes they like to run. The size of the football field remains constant; therefore, the size of the players on the field is the thing that changes. There is no need to defend a 10 yard out pattern from the opposite hash mark if the QB cannot throw the football that far. When in doubt play the CB to defend all inside passes by aligning him on the receiver's inside, no more than a couple of yards off of the Line of Scrimmage. In this position, the CB can redirect any inside movement off of the line. If there is not a wide player, the Cornerback is responsible for the Tight End on outside or deep routes.

## Safety Play

In a Pro-Set formation with one Tight End, the Safety picks up the Tight End after the Linebacker releases him, about 5-7 yards off of the LOS. The Safety is in a unique position, as he can clearly focus on the Quarterback and see the action coming at him. We want to drill the Safety in practice to not get fooled by pump and head fakes and to keep the field in front of him. When there are no wide players the Safety keys both Tight Ends and if there is only one wide player the Safety keys Tight End on the side of the wide player.

## Linebacker Play

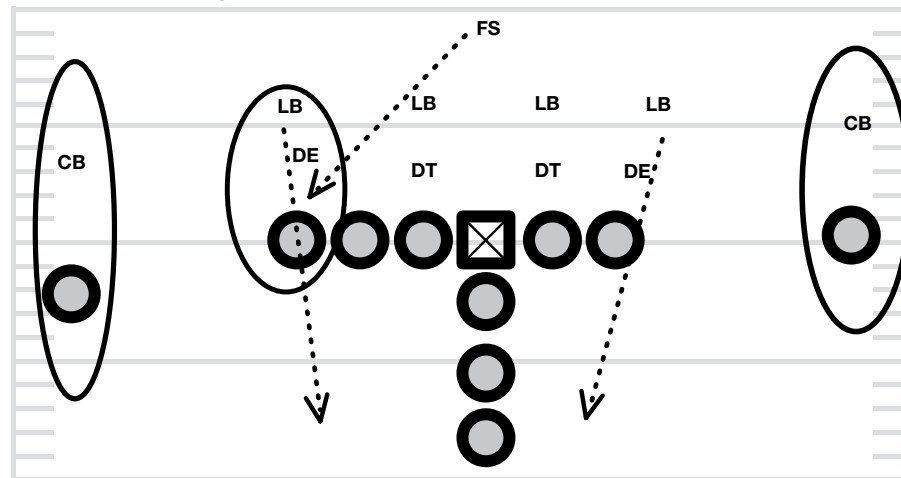
The Outside Linebackers are charged with making it difficult for the Tight End to get off of the LOS, and covering against the quick dump or quick slant pass. By delivering a blow at the snap, any quick passes should be impossible to complete. If the Outside Linebackers have an outside stunt or contain they are responsible for any swing or screen passes to their side of the field. Linebackers should not allow an eligible receiver to cross their face without delivering a blow to redirect.

*(Continued on next page).*



# Man Coverage (Cont'd)

4-4 Man Coverage vs. Pro Set



# Cover 3

The Cover 3 zone is an “in case of emergency break glass” element to the 4-4 defensive scheme. It’s an option to run on 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> down and long, when a team has to gain big chunks of yardage or needs a touchdown at the end of a half or a game. It is designed to cover the medium routes from sideline to sideline with 4 Linebackers and the deep routes from sideline to sideline with 3 defenders. The key is to keep all passes in front of the defense and then to tackle the ball. No offensive players should ever get behind the deep 3 defenders.

## **Cornerback and Safety Play**

Begin by backing the Safety up a couple of yards in his pre-snap position. The Cornerbacks should line up with a larger cushion off of the wide players, about 5 yards with an inside technique to take away any slants. On the snap of the ball, the Cornerbacks will get depth while focusing on the receiver in their zone and looking through him to the Quarterback. The depth of the deep 3 should be determined by the Quarterback’s arm strength, however, when in doubt go deeper not shorter. If the Quarterback rolls out to one side, the deep 3 should rotate that way with the playside Cornerback coming up field to the flat area, the Safety coming over to cover the playside hash mark to the sideline, and the opposite Cornerback coming over to cover the back side hash mark to the middle of the field.

## **Outside Linebackers**

Outside Linebackers (1 & 4) have the middle route flat area, which is generally about 10 yards off of the LOS, from the hash mark to the sideline on their respective sides. From their 4-4 stacked position they should open their hips and get wide and deep into the zone. They want to look for any players coming out of the backfield into their area. If the Quarterback rolls away from them they should adjust and get closer to the hash mark. If the Quarterback rolls towards them they should attack the QB with an outside rush technique and force him to run or throw the ball, without enough time to set up.

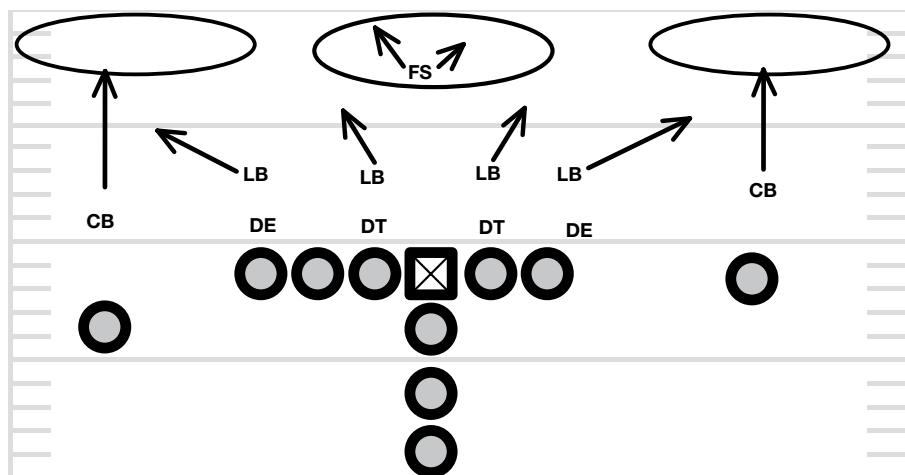
## **Inside Linebacker Play**

Inside Linebackers (2 & 3) have the inside curl area, which is the area about 10 yards off of the LOS from each hash mark to the middle of the field. The keys here are Tight Ends and Fullbacks out of the backfield and outside players running slants across the field. If the Quarterback rolls to either side the middle players must rotate, the inside LB on the roll outside rotates to the flat, and the LB on the opposite side rotates to the other curl area.

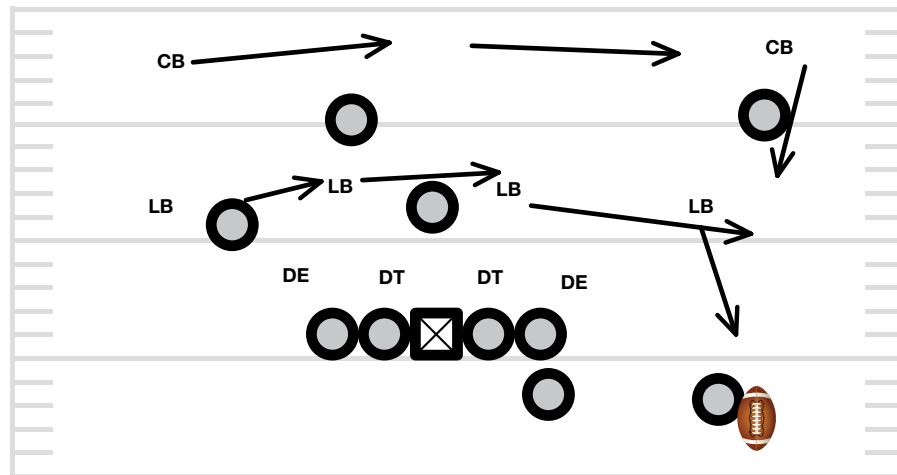
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# Cover 3 (Cont'd)

Base 4-4 vs. Pro Set Cover 3



4-4 Cover 3 Rotation for Roll Out







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