

## **SECTION 5**

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# **DEFENSIVE SKILLS**

**This section covers drills that are important for the fundamental play of individual defensive positions and position groups.**

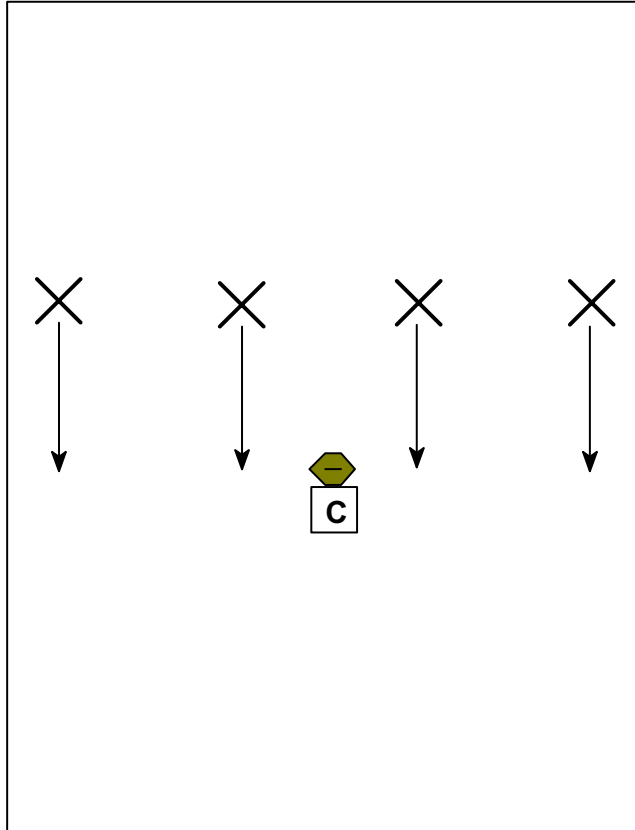
## 54. Stance and Take-Off

### *Purpose:*

- To review the defensive lineman stance.
- Practice a fast, low, Explosive take-off.
- Strengthen the leg muscles.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Start with a little more weight forward than usual.
- Turn this into a race but do not allow the players to raise up tall out of their stance.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Line up a small group of defensive linemen across from a coach. The coach is holding a football just as a center would. Check for proper stances before beginning the cadence. Vary the snap count and try to get the defense to jump offside. Once the ball moves, the linemen should explode out of their stance as quickly as possible. Emphasize a low charge. Have the linemen finish out the drill by running about five yards.

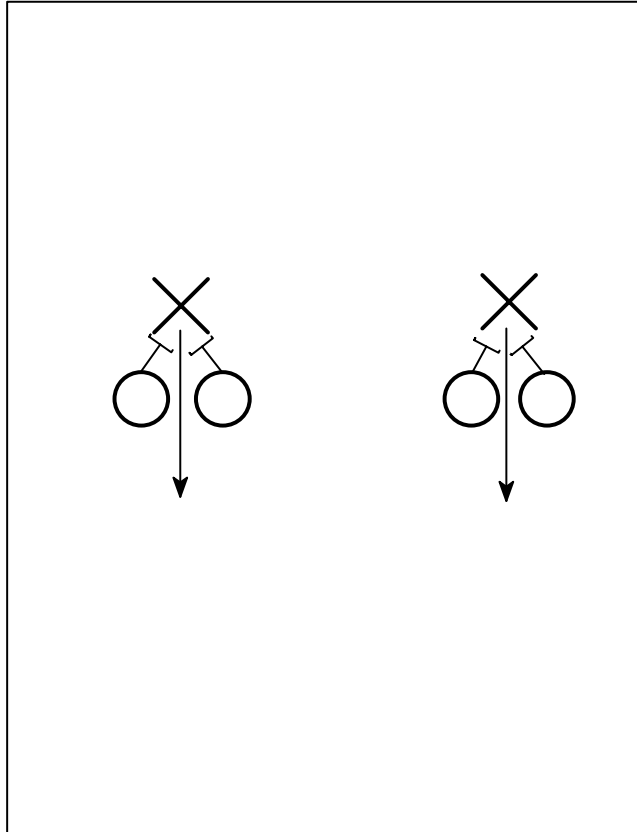
## 55. Blow the Gap

### *Purpose:*

- To review the defensive lineman stance and explosive take-off.
- Practice shooting through a gap and taking on double teams.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Start with a little more weight forward than usual.
- If you make it through the gap, gain control, find the ball, and make the tackle.
- If stalemated, stay low and keep fighting.
- When getting moved backwards, get on the ground and create a bus wreck.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Put your defensive linemen into small groups. You will need two coaches or players to hold shields or dummies for each group. If you do not have enough shields, you can have some of your other players try to prevent the defender from penetrating but keep in mind that this is a drill for developing technique and confidence in your defensive players. The offensive linemen should not deliver a devastating block. Like all drills involving the take-off of defensive linemen, it is a good idea to have a coach snap a football to instill good habits. On ball movement, the defensive linemen explode out of their stance and attempt to penetrate the gap between the two offensive players. He must use a low charge and keep his feet moving. It is ok if the defender falls or if they are unable to split the blockers as long as he continues to fight. If he cannot get through the gap, neither can the ball carrier. The worst thing he can do is to attempt to get past the blockers by taking any path other than directly through the assigned gap. Remind the defenders that if they are getting driven back on a double team, they are to get to the ground and create a pile.

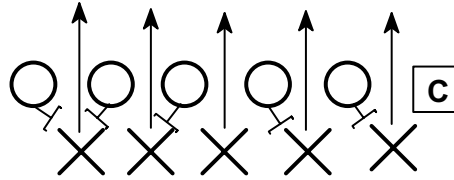
## 56. All Gaps

### *Purpose:*

- To review the defensive lineman stance and explosive take-off.
- Practice shooting through a gap and taking on one-on-one blocks and double teams.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- If you make it through the gap, gain control, find the ball, and make the tackle.
- If stalemated, stay low and keep fighting.
- When getting moved backwards, get on the ground and create a bus wreck.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Separate the defensive linemen into two lines that are facing each other. One group will play as offensive linemen and the other as the defensive line. If you have an odd number of players, the offensive line gets the extra player. Otherwise you can have a coach with a shield or dummy stand in to represent an offensive lineman. The defensive players align in the gaps of the offensive players. It is a good idea to use a ball for this drill or you can just have one player put out their hand and snap and imaginary ball. The coach calls cadence and the defensive line goes on ball movement. They attempt to fire through the gaps and get into the backfield. The offensive linemen are free to block either of the defenders that are near to them. This will result in some defensive linemen getting blocked one-on-one, some getting double-teamed, and some coming through unblocked. The defensive lineman must determine what is happening and react accordingly. Against a one-on-one block, fight the pressure and penetrate into the backfield. If unblocked, gain control and break down to find the ball. When double-teamed, attempt to stay low and split the block but get on the ground and create a pile if being driven back. The defensive linemen can never leave their assigned gap in this drill. Every player rotates one spot clockwise after every one or two reps.

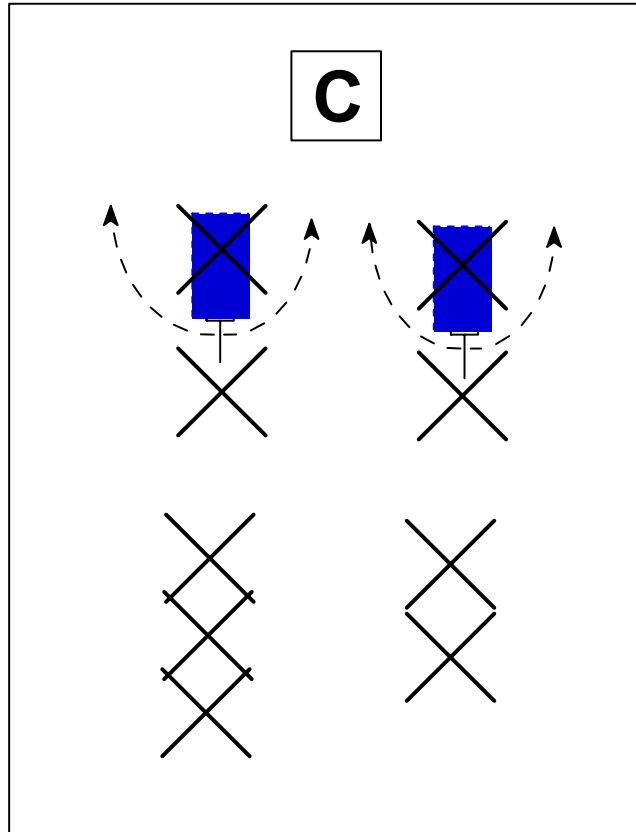
## 57. Drive and Rip

### *Purpose:*

- Teach the technique for playing as a head-up, two-gap defensive lineman.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Deliver the blow and knock the offensive lineman backward.
- Extend your arms to create space.
- Be prepared to come off to either side.
- Make a decision quickly, lose the blocker, and get to the ball.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Set up lines of defensive linemen with no more than four kids in each line. Line up a coach or player with a shield, representing an offensive lineman, in front of each line. It is also a good idea to have a coach or player acting as center so that the defenders get used to firing off on ball movement. The coach stands behind the dummy holders. When the ball moves, the defensive linemen fire off directly at the offensive linemen, making contact with the chest, both hands, and facemask (with head up). After the initial explosion, the defender attempts to lock out the offensive lineman and drive him backwards while looking into the backfield and in this case, at the coach. The coach signals the direction that the ball is going at which point the defenders should drop their far shoulder and rip the far arm underneath of the blocker, almost in an uppercut motion, to create separation. They then pursue down the line to get into position to make the tackle. At this age, defensive linemen have a tendency to pick a gap without any regard to where the ball is going. The defensive linemen in this drill should never pick a side until they get a signal from the coach. Switch dummy holders after every three to five reps.

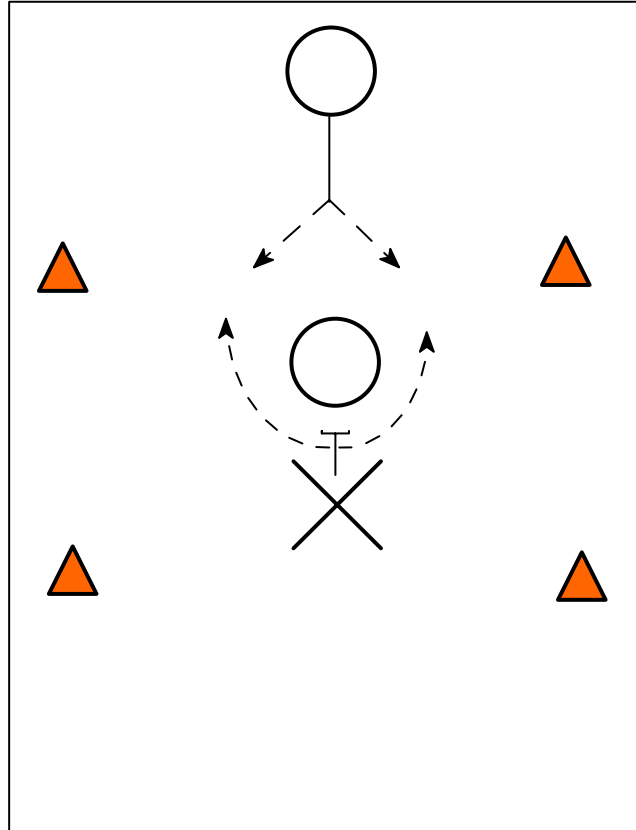
## 58. 2 vs. 1 DL Drill

### *Purpose:*

- Teach the technique for playing as a head-up, two-gap defensive lineman.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Deliver the blow and knock the offensive lineman backward.
- Extend your arms to create space.
- Be prepared to come off to either side.
- Make a decision quickly, lose the blocker, and get to the ball.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Three of you linemen will be involved in any given rep of this drill. If you have a surplus of players, it is a good idea to have more than one instance of this drill going on at a time so that players are not waiting around too long. Select one player to act as a defensive lineman, one as an offensive lineman, and one as a ball carrier. Set up an alley of cones, approximately 5 yards wide that the runner must stay within. On the cadence or ball movement, both linemen will fire out and make contact while the ball carrier attempts to run to daylight. The offensive lineman attempts to block the defender but we do emphasize that this is a defensive drill. If the blocker is more skilled than the defender, we ask him to ease up slightly but to still make the defender work hard to make the play. The defensive lineman fires off directly at the offensive lineman, making contact with the chest, both hands, and facemask (with head up). After the initial contact, the defender attempts to lock out the offensive lineman and drive him backwards while looking into to see which side the ball carrier has chosen. If the defender has created separation, he can use the rip move or another technique to get away from the blocker and make the tackle. Rotate positions after each rep.

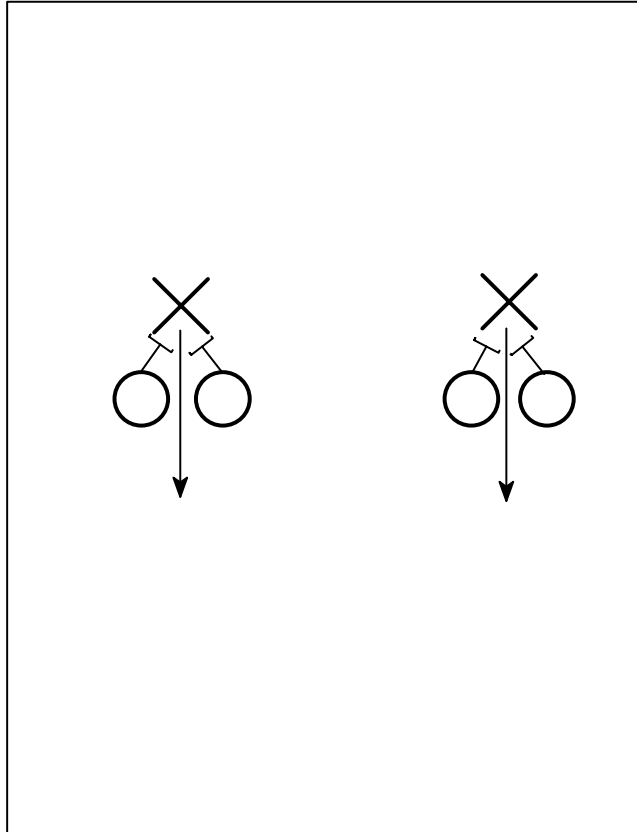
## 59. Beat the Double

### *Purpose:*

- Learn the technique for taking on double team blocks.
- React to different situations that occur when being double teamed.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- If you make it through the gap, gain control, find the ball, and make the tackle.
- If stalemated, stay low and keep fighting.
- When getting moved backwards, get on the ground and create a bus wreck.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Divide your defensive linemen into groups of three. Two players will represent offensive linemen while the other plays a defensive lineman. The defender aligns in the gap between the two blockers. On your signal or on ball movement, the blockers attempt to execute a double team block. The defender explodes low and hard with his head up, attempting to split the blockers. If he is getting stalemated, the defensive lineman can get lower, even to one knee, and continue fighting to get through. If being driven back, the defender should get on the ground and create a pile as quickly as possible. The worst thing the defender can do is to leave his assigned gap. Rotate which player is the defender after every 1-2 reps.

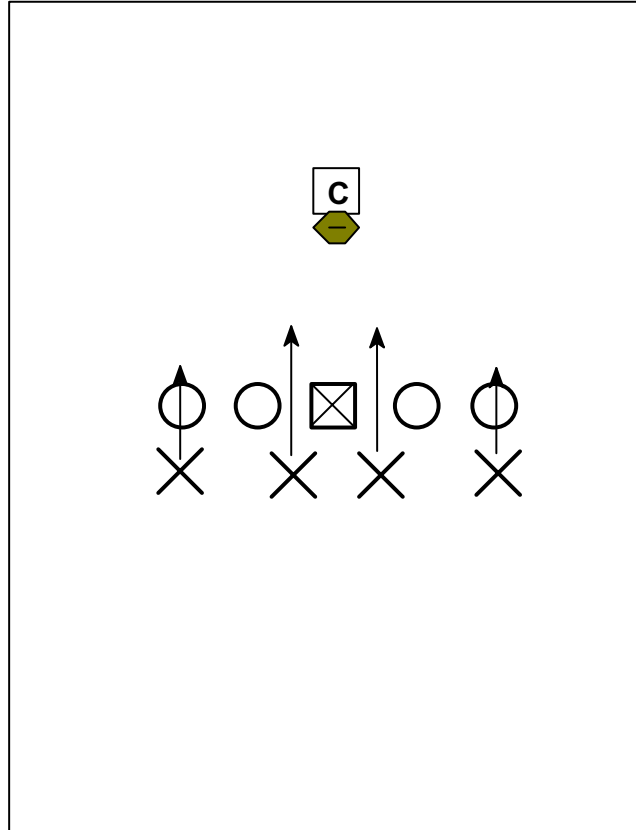
## 60. Hands Up

### *Purpose:*

- Ingrain the importance of getting your hands up during a pass rush.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Review the coaching pointers for stance and take-off.
- Rush the quarterback like mad, get your hands up in his line of vision or his throwing path if you can not make the sack.
- Never hit the QB once he has released the ball.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Have a group of defensive linemen get set in their positions. On cadence or preferably ball movement, the line executes their normal technique. The coach, acting as quarterback, drops back and raises the ball in a passing position. Once the defense recognizes that the play is a pass, they take the correct pass rushing path to the quarterback attempting to get a sack or at least to disrupt the QB's normal throwing motion by forcing him to run or by getting in the way and making him change his throwing path. If the quarterback attempts to throw before the lineman can sack him, the defenders should raise their arms and hands to get in the way of where the QB intends to throw. Try to knock the ball down but if not, at least force the QB to change his throw. The coach can mix up runs, dropback passes, and play action passes to keep the defense honest.



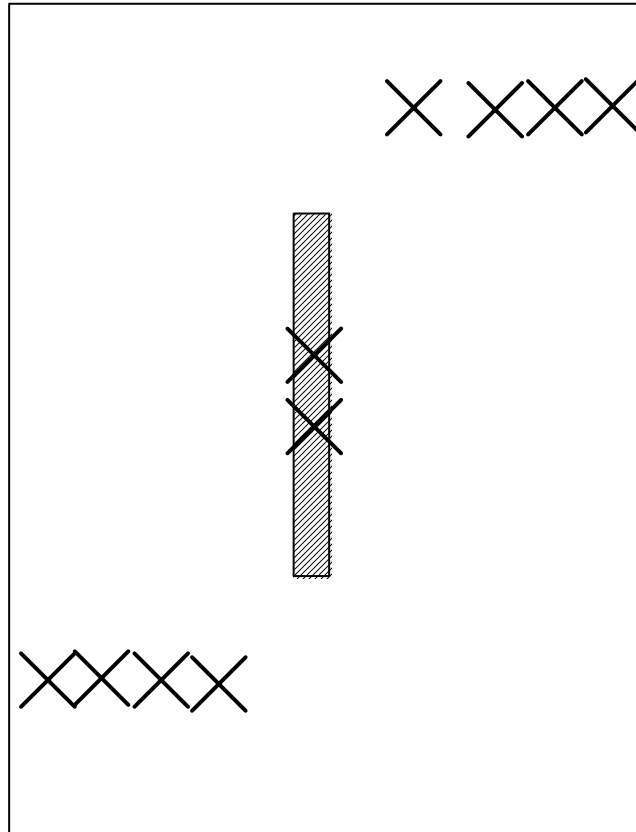
## 61. King of the Hill

### *Purpose:*

- Evaluate strength and aggressiveness.
- Teach the importance of a wide base, moving your feet, and staying low.
- Familiarize the kids with contact and have fun!

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Make sure kids are evenly matched.
- Constantly remind kids that the lower man and the player who uses his feet the best usually wins and point out examples when they occur.
- Be Very enthusiastic.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Have two equally matched players face each other about a foot apart on opposite ends of a long blocking pad or wooden board. Start them off in 3-point stances. On the signal they explode out of their stance and make contact with each other. They should meet in the middle with a collision and then attempt to drive each other backwards off of the pad or board. The player who drives his opponent off of the board is the winner. In order to be victorious, a player must keep his feet wide, stay low, and take short choppy steps.

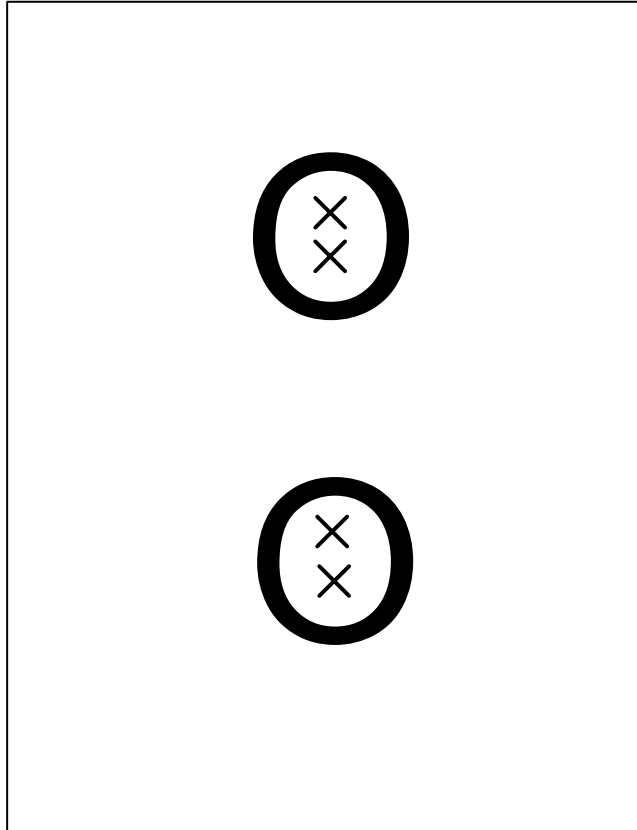
## 62. Sumo

### *Purpose:*

- Evaluate strength and aggressiveness.
- Teach staying low.
- Have fun!

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Make sure kids are evenly matched.
- Constantly remind kids that the lower man and the player who uses his feet the best usually wins and point out examples when they occur.
- Be Very enthusiastic.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Select two equally matched players to face off in a circle. The size of the circle depends on the skill level of your players but imagine a sumo circle. Start them off in the middle either in low 2-point stances with their hands on the chest of their opponent or in a three-point stance. On the signal they are to push and drive the other player to the edge of the circle. The player whose body touches outside the circle or touches the ground first is the loser. No twisting or turning is allowed, only straight up power. You will find the player that stays low, gets his hips under his opponent, and uses his legs in short choppy steps usually wins. You can use this drill to emphasize blocking technique or the techniques employed by defensive linemen.

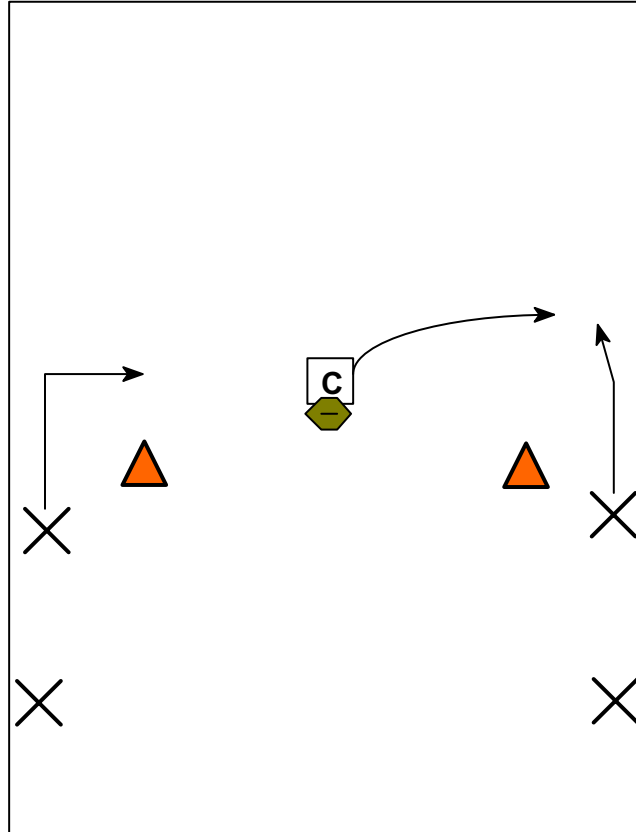
## 63. Spot, Contain, Pursue

### *Purpose:*

- Teach the box technique for contain.
- Rep the fundamentals of contain responsibility to your defensive ends or outside linebackers.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Keep your shoulders square to line of scrimmage. Never show your jersey numbers to a blocker.
- Keep the outside shoulder free.
- If play goes away, stay home looking for counter, cutback, bootleg, or reverse.
- You may rush the QB on a pass but take an “L” path under control.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Place two cones about 8 yards apart to represent the offensive tight ends. The coach stands between the two cones holding a ball. Have your defensive ends form a line behind each cone. The first two defensive ends step up and assume a proper stance outside of their cone. For our defense, we have the ends align one yard outside a tight end and two yards outside of a wing. The coach calls cadence but the ends move only when the coach simulates a snap. The coach, acting as quarterback, first drops straight back checking to see that the ends penetrate straight into the backfield, not quite as deep as the ball, without angling in. The ends must stay square, never turning their shoulders so that the coach would be able to see their jersey number. Have the ends rotate to the opposite line after each rep. The next step is to have the ends penetrate to the same depth and then to move inward in the shape of an 'L'. Again, they must not turn their shoulder or cross their feet. The next progression is to have the coach move to one side or the other to simulate a blocker coming out of the backfield. The defensive end that the coach comes at must get low and attack with his inside shoulder, keeping the outside shoulder free. The backside defensive end must slowly pursue through the backfield being prepared for a bootleg, cutback, or reverse coming back to him. Once your contain players have become proficient at these fundamentals, you can get more advanced having the coach execute cutbacks, bootlegs, dropback passes (ends rush in the shape of an 'L'), or other plays that might cause concern. You can also use the extra players to serve as blockers coming out of the backfield or pulling guards.

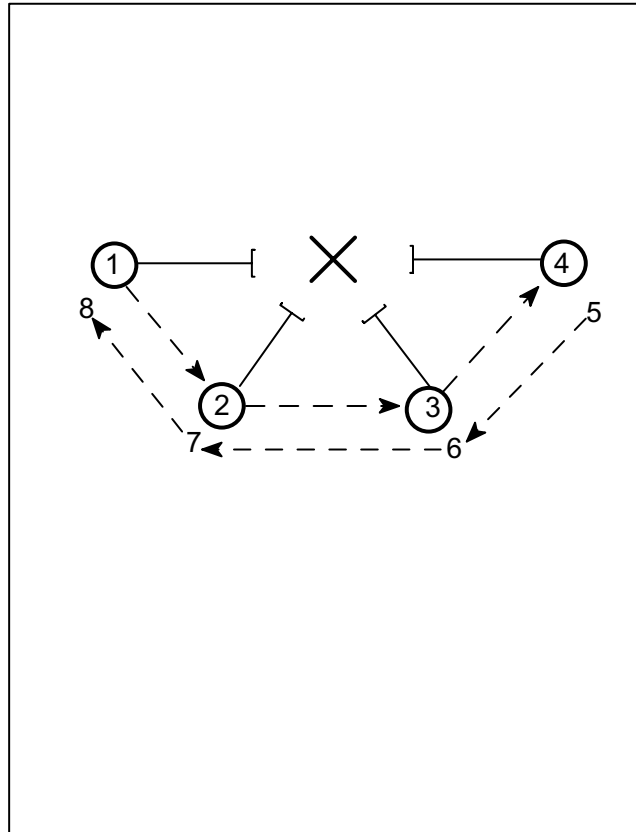
## 64. Sam Huff

### *Purpose:*

- Practice taking on and shedding a blocker.
- Acclimate players to contact.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Don't just accept the blow, deliver one of your own as you shed the block.
- Use your shoulders to deliver the blow and your arms to separate yourself from the blocker.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Separate players into groups of 4 or 5. One player will be in the middle with two players to the side and the other player(s) in front of him. The boys should line up relatively close to the middle player, no more than 3 or 4 yards distance between them. Start with the player to the right side of the middle player coming in to execute a block. The middle player must step in and take on the block with his right shoulder, gather himself, and be prepared for the next hit. One at a time from left to right, the other players will step up to hit the middle boy who must use proper form to take on each blocker. The player to the far left will execute to blocks in a row and then the other boys will make contact once more in reverse order. Rotate a new boy to the center and repeat until everyone has gone.

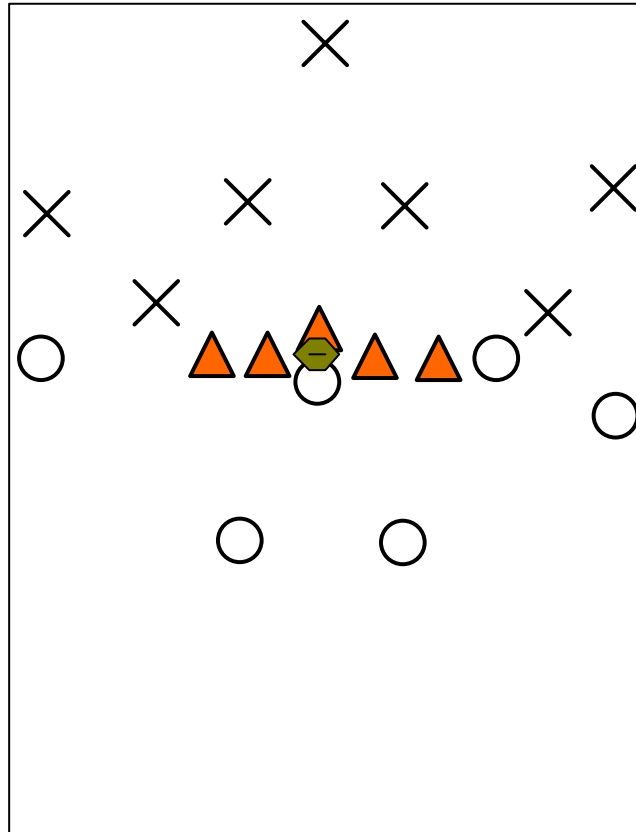
## 65. Outside Drill

### *Purpose:*

- Practice defending plays with your defensive backs and linebackers.
- Learn to work together to defend sweeps, passes, and isolation plays.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Try to get a lot of reps. Coach on the fly and spend minimal time in the huddle.
- If it will increase the number of reps you can get, have a coach play quarterback.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Place 5 cones or alternate objects to represent the offensive center, guards, and tackles. Line up your defensive personnel in their positions without the interior defensive line. Those players should be working on another drill or, if you do not have enough skill players to run a scout offense, the defensive linemen can play offense (they usually enjoy this as it gives the linemen a chance to play positions that they normally would not be able to.) Prior to the start of practice, the coach will have drawn up cards with the offensive plays of your upcoming opponent or common plays that you feel the defense needs to work on. It is best to use a letters for each position on the card and assign each of your scout players a letter (Billy is 'T', Jack is 'F', and so on.) Show the play to the scout offense using as little time as possible, break the huddle, and check the defensive alignment. When executing the plays, we will run full speed but with no tackling. Coach your players up after each play and then quickly huddle for the next rep.

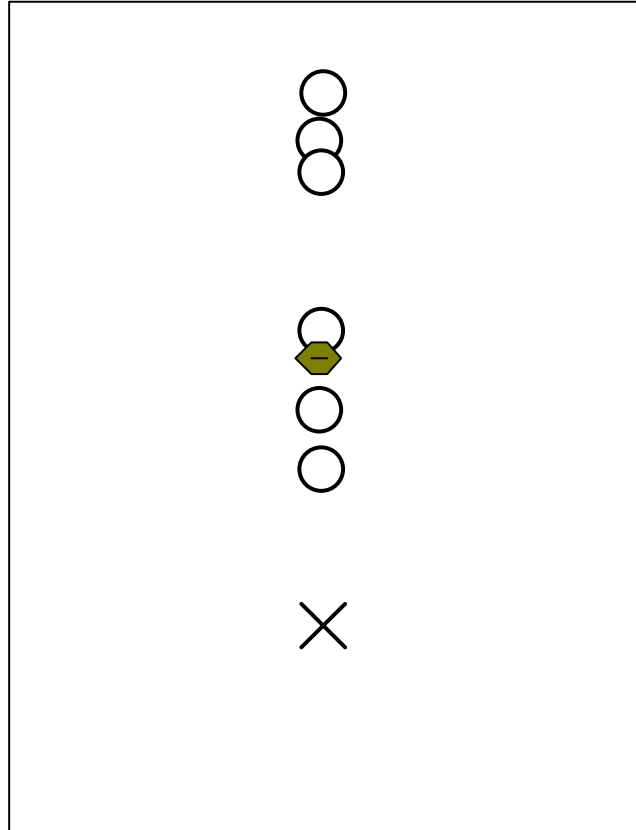
## 66. Shed the Block

### *Purpose:*

- Learn how to take on and get rid of a lead blocker.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Attack the blocker. Don't just take the hit.
- Get low, step and take on the block with your shoulder.
- Don't engage him. Get rid of him. Use your arms to toss the blocker to the side.
- The initial contact and the shed are all one continuous motion.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Set up any players that will be participating in the drill in a straight line. Have the first person in line step out approximately 4 yards in front of everyone else, turn, and face the group. With the rest of the players still in line, give a football to the third player. The first player in line will charge out and execute a block on the player in front of him. That boy must shed the block with either his right or left shoulder, gather himself, and prepare for the next blocker. The second person in line will come out immediately after the first block has been shed. He will be followed by the third player who is holding a football and acting as a ball carrier. The player out in front will shed the block, this time using the opposite shoulder, gather himself, and then execute a form tackle on the third player without taking him to the ground. After each rep, the player out in front goes to the back of the line, the player who was first in line comes out in front, and everyone else moves one spot up in the line.

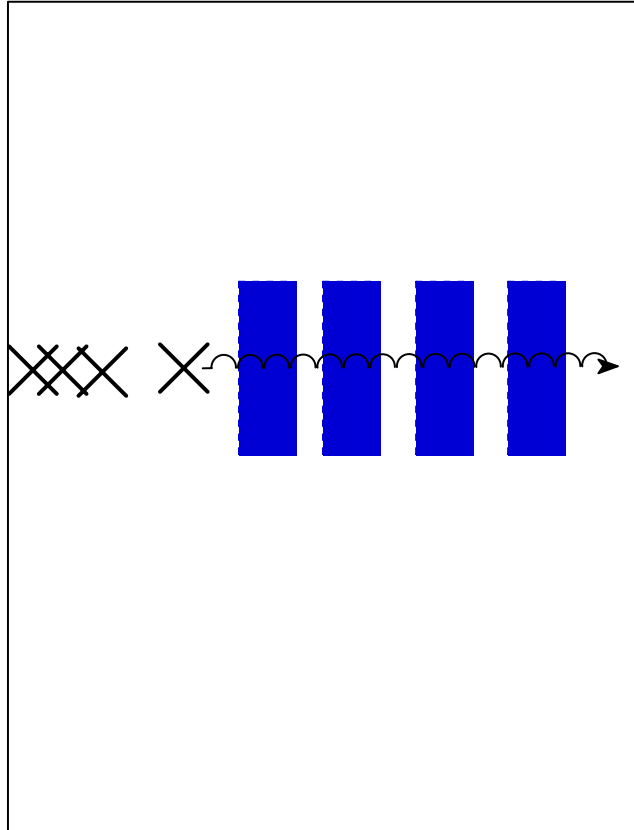
## 67. Bag Work

### *Purpose:*

- To improve overall agility and athleticism.
- Teach players to stay square to the line of scrimmage while pursuing a ball carrier (good drill for linebackers).

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Keep your shoulders square when moving laterally.
- Lift your knees up high when going over a bag or cone.
- If you fall, get up quickly.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

This drill is typically done at the higher levels with 5 or 6 tackling dummies or agility bags. Since most of us will not have access to that type of equipment, cones or rolled up bath towels may be substituted. Lay down the obstacles in a straight line with about two feet in between each one. The distance between objects should allow the players to maneuver comfortably and may vary for different age groups. Have a group of about 6 players make a straight line behind the first bag and execute the following agility drills as they travel through the bags: 1) High knees, 2) Bunny hops, 3) Side shuffle in a zig-zag while facing forward, 4) turn sideways and run forward and then backpedal in a zig-zag, 5) turn sideways and high knee over each bag. Do each skill twice.

This is a great drill for linebackers as it teaches them to move laterally to the line of scrimmage without turning their shoulders.

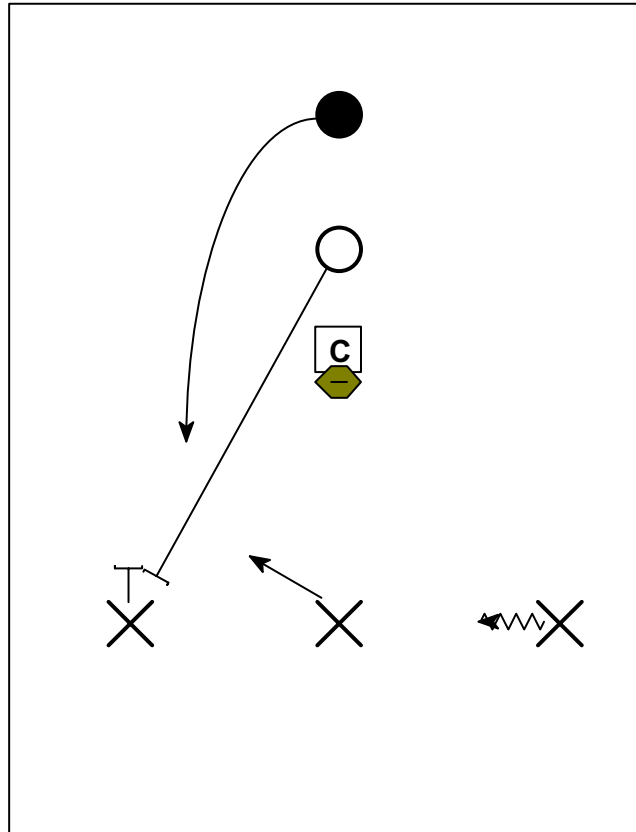
## 68. Triangle Drill

### *Purpose:*

- Practice taking on and shedding a lead blocker.
- Learn how to defend the isolation play.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Attack the blocker. Don't just take the hit.
- Get low, step into the man and take on the block with your outside shoulder.
- Don't engage him. Get rid of him. Use your arms to toss the blocker to the side.
- The initial contact and the shed are all one continuous motion.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

I call this the triangle drill because we typically have three linebackers but you can do the same drill with only two backers. Have the coach represent the quarterback and have your backers align in their normal defensive spots. Take two extra players as offensive backs and align them in either an I formation or as splitbacks. Typically we use this drill to practice defending the isolation play. Tell your backs which direction you will be running to and have one of them act as a lead blocker, attempting to block the playside linebacker. The linebacker must step up and take on the block with his inside shoulder, keeping the outside shoulder free. If done correctly, the back will have to cut the ball back to the oncoming backside linebacker or widen to attempt to get outside of the playside backer's free shoulder. If he chooses the latter, the playside backer must play off the block and wrap up on the ball carrier. We never bring the back to the ground in this drill. Although this drill is chiefly done to practice defending the iso, we could also practice proper pursuit angles on sweeps and coverage against passes.



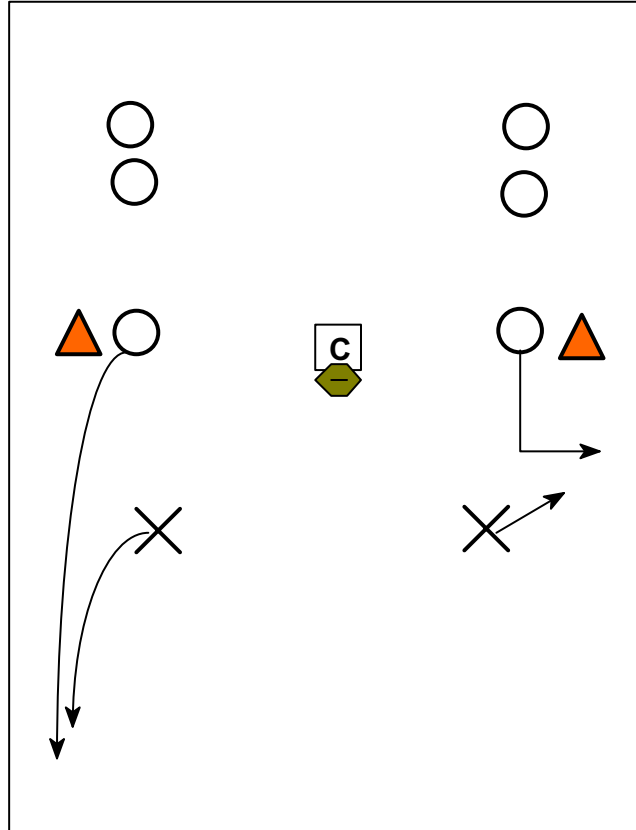
## 69. Man Coverage

### *Purpose:*

- Practice man coverage technique.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Align one yard inside and three yards off of the receiver.
- Keep your eyes on the receiver and stay with him wherever he goes.
- Stay just inside and just behind the receiver. If he gets past you, turn and run to catch up.
- When his hands come up, put your hand in between his hands and in front of his face as you look for the ball.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Place two cones anywhere from 20 to 30 yards apart from each other. Two even lines form behind the cones and the coach, acting as quarterback will stand in between the cones. You may want to separate your more experienced or skilled players into one line and your players who are still developing into the other line. The first player in each line comes out and plays defensive back. He will use man coverage technique on the player who is now at the front of the line. On the coaches signal, the receivers are free to run any route that they choose. The coach must choose a receiver and throw the ball relatively quickly. After each rep, the defender goes to the end of the line and the receiver becomes the defender. Coach the players on the techniques that you stress regarding man coverage. For us, we want the defender to align three yards off of the receiver and one yard inside. Once the play starts, stay just behind and just inside of the receiver keeping your eyes on him the entire time. Always be in position that if the receiver does catch the ball, you can tackle him right away. If the receiver gets behind you, turn and run as fast as you can to catch up. When the receiver looks for the ball, you place your hand in between his hands and in front of his face, turn and look.

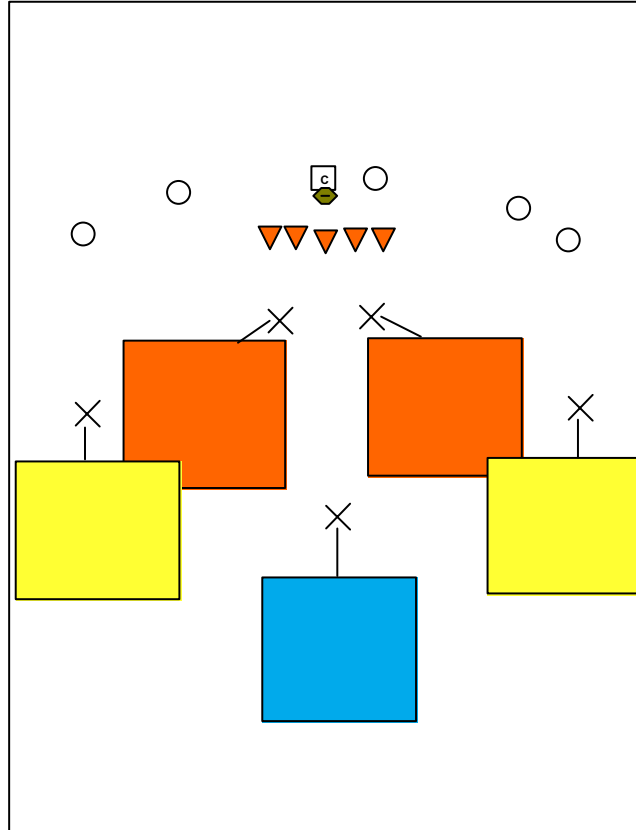
## 70. Zone Coverage

### *Purpose:*

- Teach zone coverage concepts and technique.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- You are covering an area of the field, not a particular man.
- Use peripheral vision to be aware of receivers in your zone but watch the QB. His eyes and body motion will show you where he intends to throw.
- Once the pass is in the air, all zones disappear. Get to the ball.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Place cones down to represent the offensive players and set up a skeleton defense using only the positions that are active in pass coverage. Explain the situations where you would use zone coverage and the difference between zone and man coverage (man you cover a specific player no matter where he goes, in zone you cover an area of the field and are responsible for any player that enters that area). In man, we teach our defenders to keep their eyes on the player they are covering but in zone, we want them to look at the quarterback and to use their peripheral vision to be aware of any receivers that enter the zone. The quarterback's eyes and body will indicate the direction to which he intends to throw. You may want to use cones or spray paint to set up boxes that represent the different zones your defenders will have to cover. The coach will simulate a snap and drop back into his passing stance. All defenders that are in zone coverage will drop to their designated zone while keeping their eyes on the quarterback. As the quarterback looks, turns, or rolls to different directions, the defense may adjust as necessary. The coach throws the ball and all defenders run toward it (the zones disappear once the ball is in the air). If someone intercepts, they yell "Sideline!" and all players head to the near sideline. As the defense improves, you may add receivers or use zone coverage in your passing scrimmage.

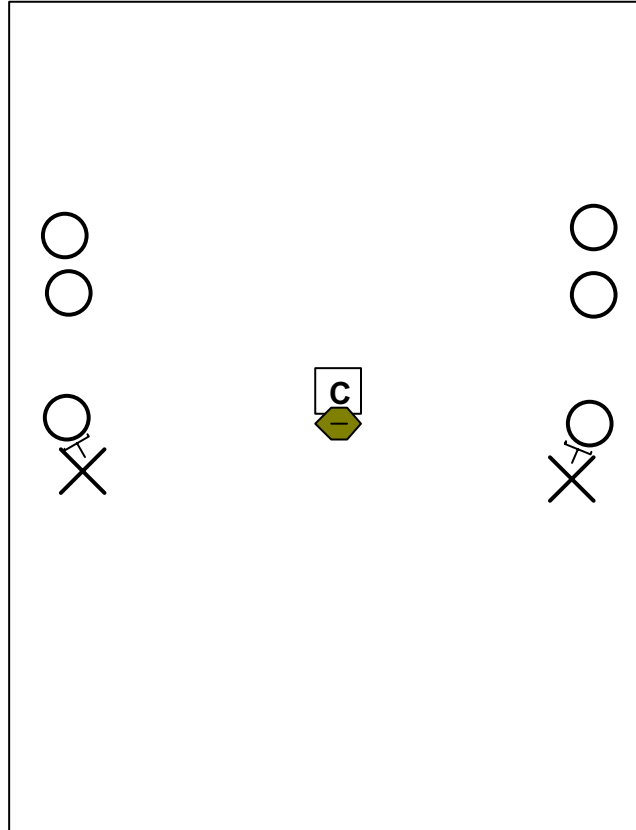
## 71. Jam Coverage

### *Purpose:*

- Practice jam coverage concepts and technique.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Align on the inside shoulder of the receiver, as close to him as possible. Your outside leg dissects the receiver.
- Keep your eyes on the receiver. When he moves, you move.
- Punch his chest with the palms of both hands and try to jam him on the line.
- If he gets away, follow him and maintain man coverage.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Review the situations where you would use jam coverage with your players and the techniques you want them to use. For us, we try not to overdo it with techniques but instead tell them to be very physical here. We want them to align on the inside shoulder of the receiver and as close to their man as possible without being offside. They look only at their man and are concerned with nothing else. When their man moves, we want to punch him in the chest with the palms of both hands and keep him from releasing for a pass. If he does release, follow him and maintain regular man coverage. If your man blocks, continue to engage him but look inside to see if the play is a run coming your way. If so, shed the block and make the tackle.

Place two cones about 20 yards apart from each other. Two even lines form behind the cones and the coach, acting as quarterback will stand in between the cones. You may want to separate your more experienced or skilled players into one line and your players who are still developing into the other line. The first player in each line comes out and plays defense. He will use jam coverage technique on the player who is now at the front of the line. The offensive players can either run a pass route or block. The coach can pass or run depending on what the offensive players are doing. After each rep, the defender goes to the end of the line and the receiver becomes the defender.

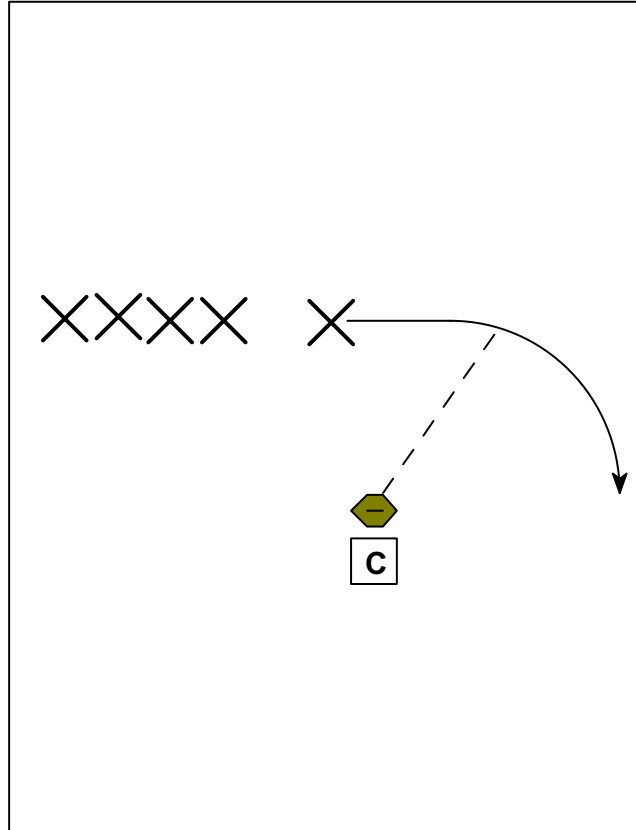
## 72. Interceptions

### *Purpose:*

- Apply catching techniques to intercepting the ball on defense.
- Learn what to do once an interception has occurred.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Catch the ball with your hands and eyes.
- If you make an interception, yell “Sideline!” and head to the nearest sideline.
- If you hear “Sideline!”, one of your teammates has intercepted the ball. Find which sideline he is headed to and get in front of him to block. Never block an opponent in the back or below the waist.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

A group of no more than 6 players forms a line behind a cone. The coach kneels down about 10 feet away from the line with several footballs beside him. First remind the kids or ask them about what happens when we make an interception. The player who makes the interception yells, “Sideline!” and heads for the nearest sideline. All of his teammates find which sideline he is headed toward and go that way attempting to block an opponent. Emphasize that they must never block below the waist or behind the back. After this, the players run one at a time at about three quarters speed. The coach tosses a football to the player who tries to catch it with his hands. If he makes the catch, the player yells “Sideline!” and continues as if running down the near sideline. Make sure that the player returns the ball to the pile near the coach before going to the back of the line. Give each player 4 or 5 reps of this drill.

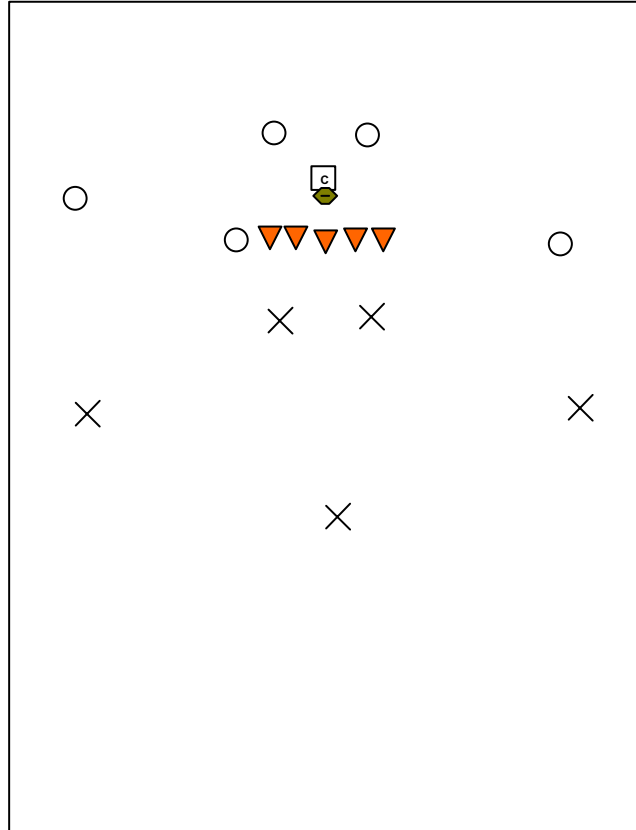
## 73. Passing Scrimmage

### *Purpose:*

- Review and practice the responsibilities of your defensive backs and backers against the pass.
- Practice the fundamentals of man and / or zone pass coverage in a game situation.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Review the concepts for man and zone coverage.
- Get many reps. Coach on the fly.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Place five cones down to represent the five interior offensive linemen and set up a skeleton defense using only the positions that are active in pass coverage. If you have enough extra skill players, they will serve as the offensive runningbacks, receivers, and tight ends. The coach can play as quarterback. If you do not have enough extra skill players, the linemen always enjoy the opportunity to play skill positions. Prior to practice, create note cards with common pass plays or the plays of your upcoming opponent. It is best to use a letters for each position on the card and assign each of your scout players a letter (Billy is 'T', Jack is 'F', and so on.) Show the play to the scout offense using as little time as possible, break the huddle, and check the defensive alignment. When executing the plays, we will run full speed but with no tackling. Coach your players up after each play and then quickly huddle for the next rep.

## **SECTION 6**

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# **TACKLING & TEAM DEFENSE**

**This section provides drills that will help develop defensive team concepts and cohesion between your players, as well as a variety of drills for introducing and improving tackling.**

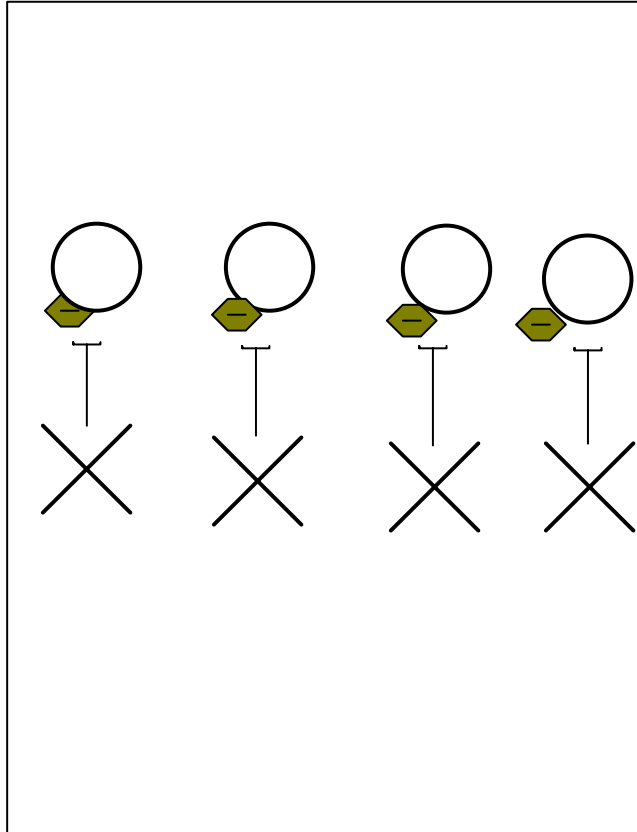
## 74. Form Fit

### *Purpose:*

- Introduce the fundamentals of a form tackle.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Tackling starts with a good hit position.
- Place your shoulder in his midsection.
- Wrap the arms around his butt or just underneath. Lock the hands or grab cloth.
- Always keep your head up when tackling. Screws to the ball.
- Lift on contact and keep your feet moving. Don't hit the man, hit through him.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

This is how we introduce tackling to our players. First we will have everyone take a knee as we read the warning on the back of the helmet to them, emphasizing that they must keep their head up at all times. Next we show them the two screws that hold the top of the facemask to the helmet and explain that when we say “screws to the ball” we mean that we would like them to keep their head up so that those two screws make contact with the ball while executing a tackle.

Players find a partner that is of comparable size and line up facing directly across from them. Partners should be only a few feet apart and at least five feet away from any other group. We designate one side to be the tackler and the other side as the ball carrier. You may give the runner a ball or just have him hold his arm as if carrying a football. Slowly go through the progression of a proper form tackle. Start in hit position, take one step, put the screws to the ball with shoulder in the runner's stomach. The arms wrap around the butt or just below and the tackler locks his hands or grabs cloth in the back. Do this a couple of times with the ball on both sides and for both partners.

Next, have the tackler keep his feet moving, driving the runner back a few steps after the form fit. Be sure not to go to the ground here. Again, rep this progression a couple of times. The final step is to have the tackler attempt to lift the runner and carry him backwards. If their partner is bigger, players may not be able to lift for very long and that is ok. We just want them to get a feel for lifting when tackling. Again, be sure not to go to the ground and rep this several times.

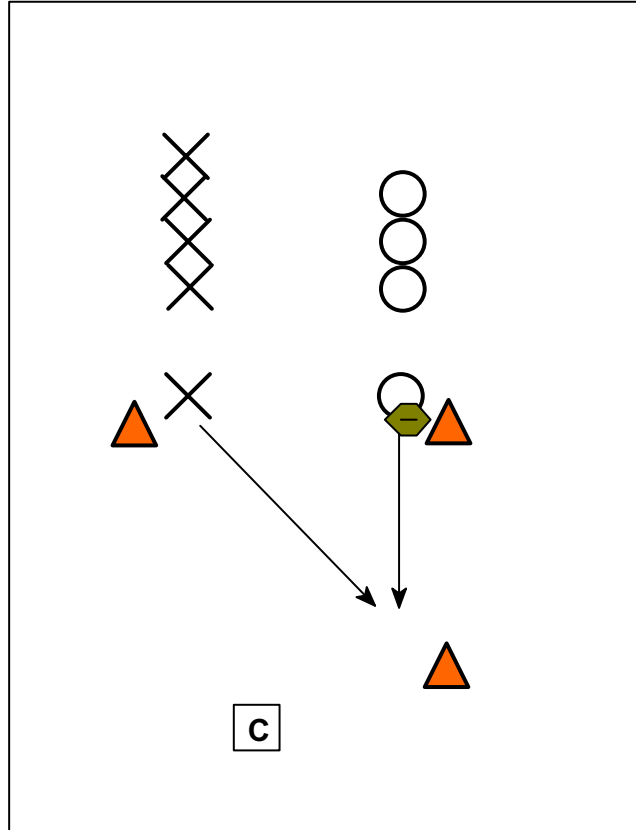
## 75. Angle Tackling

### *Purpose:*

- Teach proper form when executing an angle tackle.
- Get acclimated to contact in a controlled setting.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Review the techniques for a proper form tackle – hit position, screws to the ball, wrap around the butt, etc.
- Head must always be in front on an angle tackle.
- You may want to have a coach stand to the side to insure that the players do not go to the ground.
- Do not do this drill with your whole team. Any more than 8-10 people creates unnecessary waiting.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Form two lines about 5 yards apart from each other. Place a cone in front of one line and give the first three people in the line a football. That line will be the runners and the other line, the tacklers. On the coaches signal, the players jog at three-quarters speed to the cone. The tackler will execute the proper form for an angle tackle, driving the runner a few steps before releasing him. We want a little bit of contact here but we do not want our players to go to the ground. After each rep, the runner gives the ball to the next person in line who does not already have one and both players go to the back of the opposite line. After everyone has gotten a few reps, switch which line is the runners and which line is the tacklers.



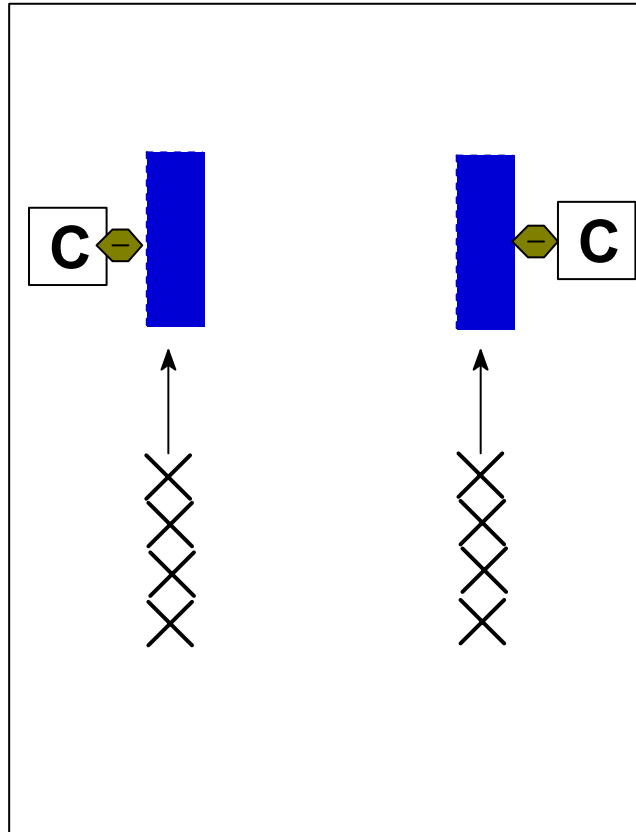
## 76. Popsicle

### *Purpose:*

- To teach full speed form tackling in a controlled setting.
- Emphasize keeping the head up and putting screws to the ball.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Review the techniques for a proper form tackle – hit position, screws to the ball, wrap around the butt, etc.
- Don't just hit the man, hit through the man.
- Do not do this drill with your whole team. Any more than 8-10 people creates unnecessary waiting.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

For this drill you will need two tackling dummies and a coach for each bag. Set down cones 5 or more yards away from each dummy and form a line behind each cone. The coaches keep the dummy up, holding it the outside while placing a ball against it at about the level where a runningback would carry it. On the signal, the first player in each line will execute a running, full speed form tackle on the dummy, making sure to keep his head up and placing the screws on the ball. We want our players to know that if they place the screws on the ball, it can create a fumble and that is exactly what should happen in this drill. After the tackle, each player recovers the fumble that they created, gives the ball back to the coach, and then returns to the back of the opposite line so that on their next rep, they may practice tackling with their head on the other side.

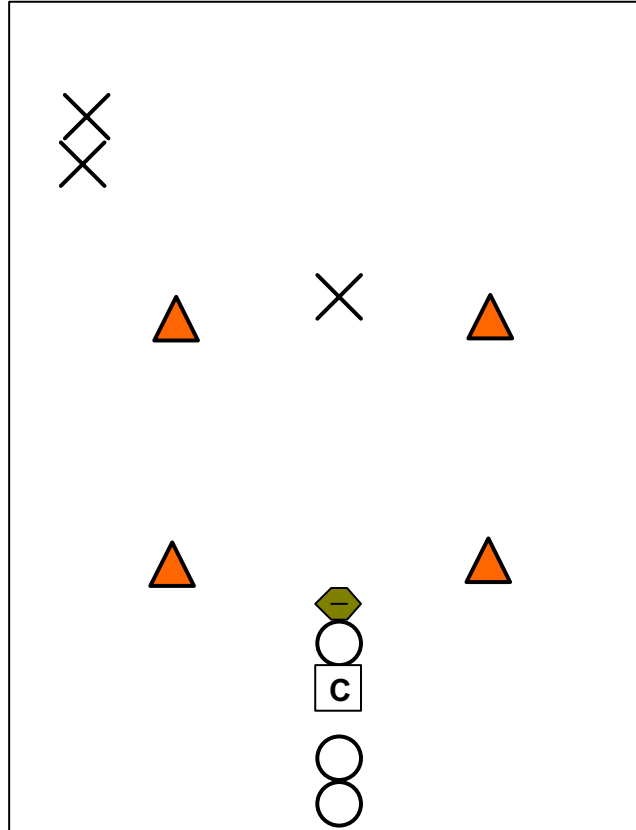
## 77. Get Up Tackling

### *Purpose:*

- Teach form tackling in a controlled setting.
- Acclimate the kids to contact.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Review the techniques for a proper form tackle – hit position, screws to the ball, wrap around the butt, etc.
- If the player is losing the man, grab on to his shoe, part of his jersey, something... Just don't turn him loose. Someone is coming to help you.
- Create even match-ups.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

An old favorite with a slight variation. Set up four cones to create an alley that is about 6-8 yards long and 4 yards wide. Form two lines, one line of runners behind the coach and another line of tacklers off to the side. It is important that the line of tacklers stays out of the way of the drill. The first player in each line enters the alley. The tackler will lay down on his back and the coach will grab the back of the ball carrier's shirt. On the signal, the tackler must get up as quickly as possible. Once he is to his feet, the coach will release the ball carrier. The runner may not leave the alley as he attempts to get past the tackler. After each rep, coach the players and have them return to the back of the opposite line (runner goes to the tackling line and vice versa).

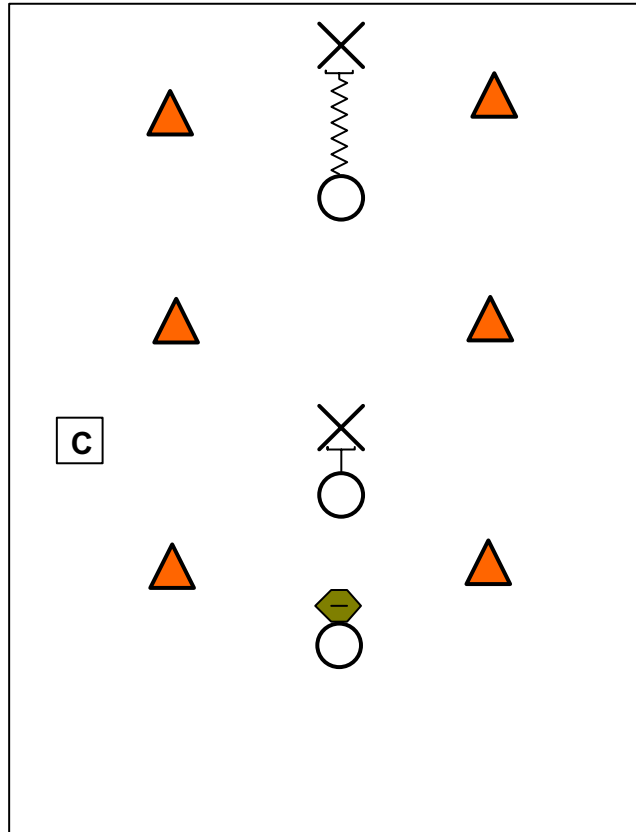
## 78. Oklahoma

### *Purpose:*

- Review offensive line and stalk blocking techniques.
- Practice defensive line technique for a two-gap defender.
- Practice tackling.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- This is a down and dirty drill. Be very energetic and keep the kids fired up.
- Try to create even matchups.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Use cones to set up a running lane approximately 5 yards wide and 10 yards long. Five players at a time will participate in the drill. At the beginning, two linemen will line up close to each other in three point stances. About 6 yards beyond that, two skill players will align in hit position approximately 3 yards apart. On the signal the offensive players will attempt to block the defenders who are trying to get free and tackle a ball carrier.

While one group is going, it is a good idea to have coaches matching up kids for the next round so as to maximize reps.

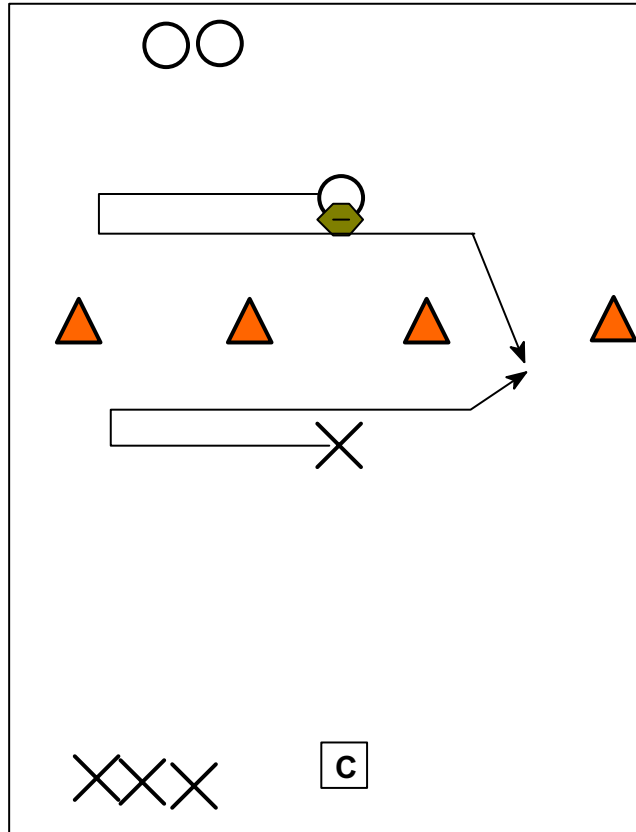
## 79. Three Slot Challenge

### *Purpose:*

- Improve tackling.
- Practice staying square to the line of scrimmage while moving laterally.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- The defender must keep his shoulders square to the line of scrimmage (an excellent drill for linebackers).
- If you do not bring the man down, grab hold of him and don't let go. Someone would be coming to help you.
- This is more of a full speed tackling drill. You may want to keep some kids out until they are ready.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Set down four cones in a straight line. Each cone should be about 6 feet apart. Divide your players into two groups and have each group go to a separate side of the cones. One group will be the ball carriers (give them footballs) and the other will be the tacklers. The first player in each line will come forward and face each other standing about 5 yards apart in the middle of the cones. The offensive player begins moving laterally back and forth while the defender mirrors him, always keeping his shoulders square to the line and never crossing his feet. When the ball carrier is ready, he will run in one of the three available slots (it can be his choice or the coach can tell him where to run). The defender must meet him and bring him down by executing a form tackle.

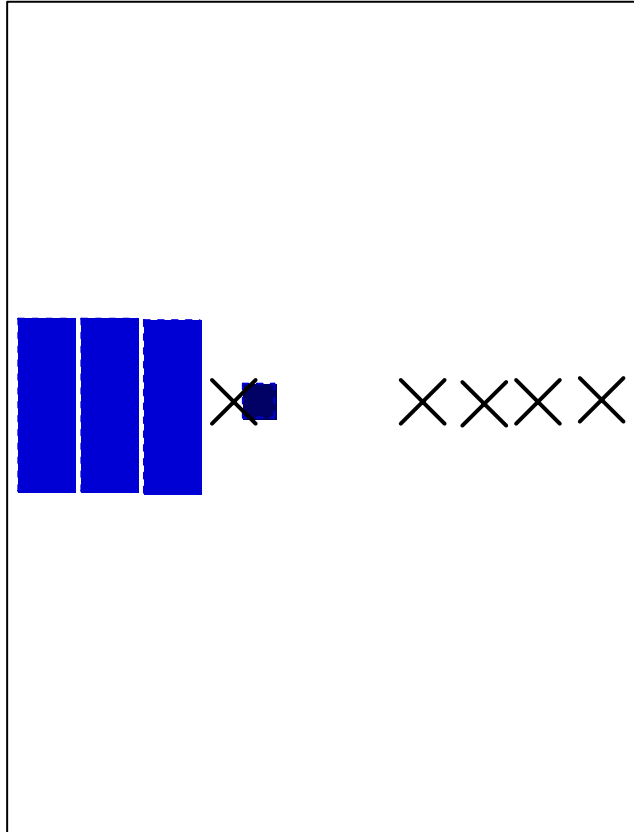
## 80. Splatter Tackling

### *Purpose:*

- Teach form tackling in a safe, fun environment.
- Acclimate your kids to contact.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Keep the tackler close to the bag holder. Never allow more than a few feet of running start.
- This drill is a favorite but do not let the kids get wild and sloppy. We are trying to improve form tackling.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Splatter drills are one of the best ways to practice technique and acclimate your young players to contact. If you have a mattress (full size or bigger and the thicker the better) that you can transport to your practice field, I suggest using that. Otherwise, create a landing mat by placing three or four long tackling dummies side by side. If you have to use the latter method, you will need to have a coach stay by the dummies to make certain that they do not become separated. If you do have a mattress, place one tackling dummy at the front so that the blockers will need to use their hips to lift the player over the bag. Give one boy a blocking shield and have him stand in front of the landing area. Line up the other players and have one boy come line up about 5 feet away from the shield holder. Make sure he stays reasonably close to prevent him from gaining too much momentum prior to contact. That player executes a form tackle on the shield holder, lifting him up over the dummy and onto the landing area. You can use this drill for straight ahead or angle tackling. Switch the shield holder every five or six reps.

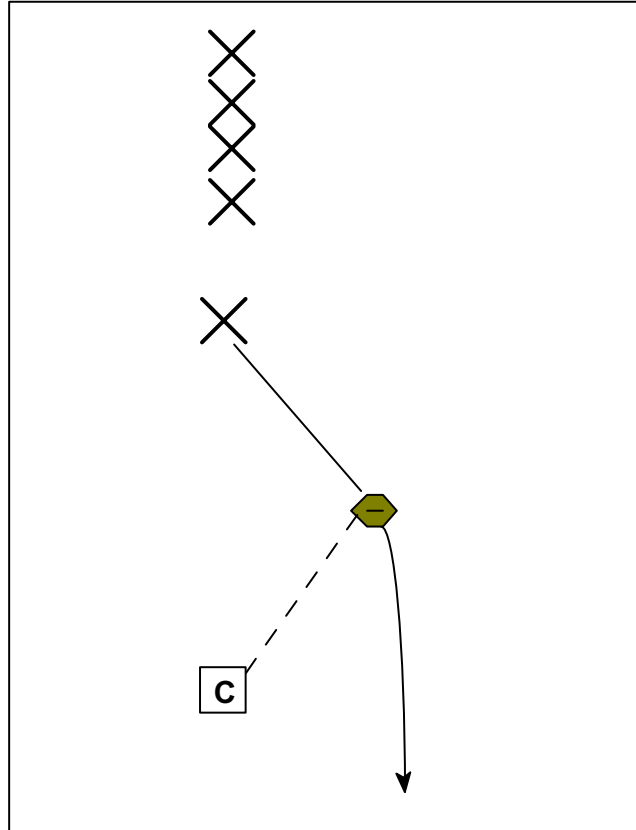
## 81. Fumble Recovery

### *Purpose:*

- Learn when to pick up a fumble and when to fall on it.
- Learn how to protect yourself when falling on a fumble.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- If an opponent is near the ball, fall on it and tuck into the fetal position to protect your arms and legs.
- If no opponent is around, slow down half a step and scoop the ball with arms totally extended. Run for a touchdown.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Form a line with a group of no more than 8 players. First remind the players that when we are on defense, if the ball is loose and an opposing player is going for it, we want to fall on the ball to make sure that we recover it. Emphasize the importance of laying on your side and tucking your arms and legs in the fetal position. This will protect you if somebody falls on you after the recovery. The coach kneels about 10 feet away with many footballs around him. He will throw out a ball and yell, "Go!" for each player to run, recover, and tuck into a ball. Throw the balls into different areas so that multiple players can safely do the drill at the same time. Each player must set the ball down next to the coach as he returns to the back of the line.

Next, tell the players that if the ball is loose and there are no opposing players around, we want to pick the ball up and score. The preferred technique is to slow down just half a step, fully extend the arms with no bend in the elbows, and make sure the ball is secured before you take off running. Again, the coach kneels about 10 feet away with many footballs around him. He will throw out a ball and yell, "Go!" for each player to run, pick up the ball, and continue for another ten yards. Throw the balls into different areas so that multiple players can safely do the drill at the same time. Each player must set the ball down next to the coach as he returns to the back of the line.

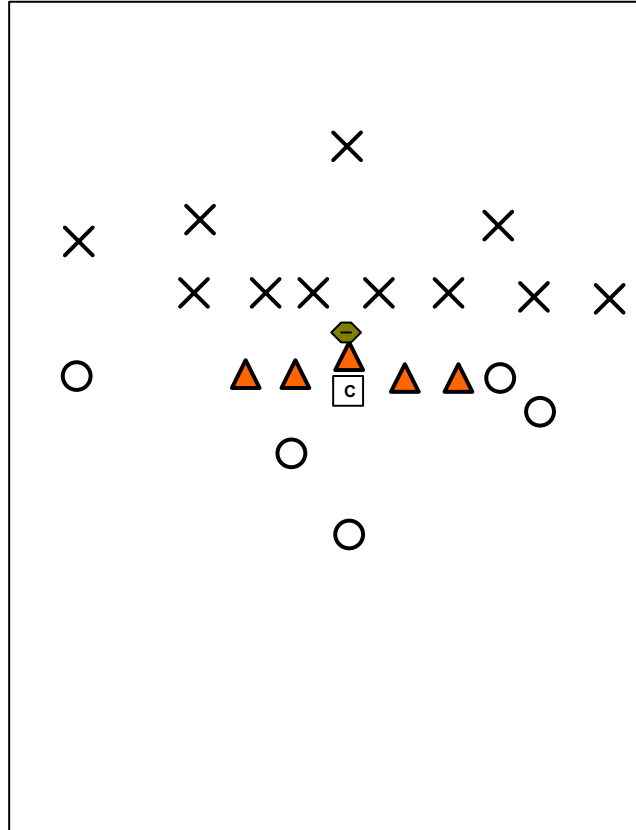
## 82. Adjust to Formations

### *Purpose:*

- Practice aligning to different offensive formations and adjusting to shifting and motion.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Try to get a lot of reps. Coach on the fly and spend minimal time in the huddle.
- It's ok to have more than one player standing at a given position.
- If you have a position that does not adjust, do not include them in this drill.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Place five cones down to represent the five interior offensive linemen and assign extra players to serve as the offensive skill positions. The coach can play as quarterback. Prior to practice, create note cards with common formations, the formations of your upcoming opponent, or special formations that may give you trouble such as an unbalanced line, empty backfield, etc. It is best to use a letters for each position on the card and assign each of your scout players a letter (Billy is 'T', Jack is 'F', and so on.) Show the card to the scout offense using as little time as possible, break the huddle, and check the defensive alignment. Make sure each player is lined up correctly and knows what to do once the ball is snapped. You may place a man in motion to see if the defense can react properly if you like. Make any corrections and hurry back to the huddle for the next rep.

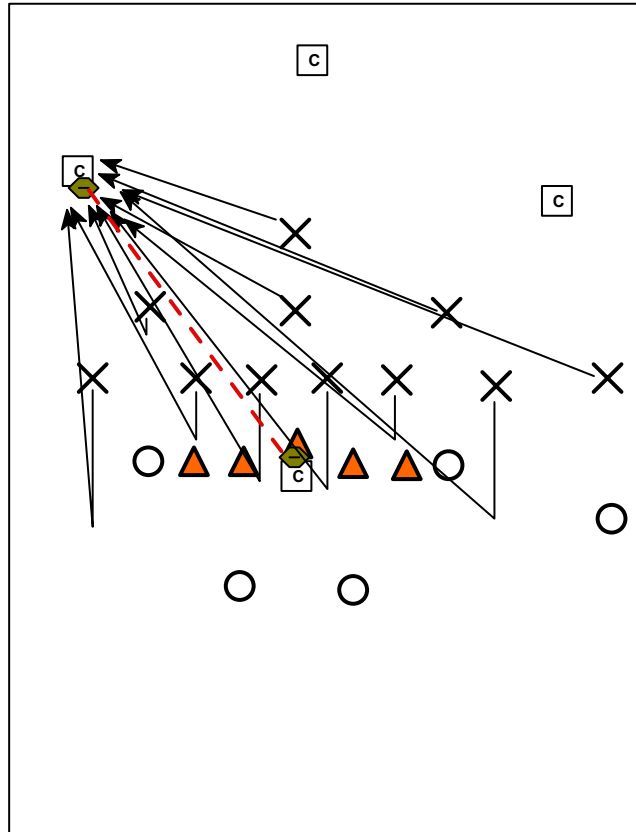
## 83. Do Your Job

### *Purpose:*

- Review formation adjustments.
- Make sure everyone knows their assignment once the ball is snapped.
- Emphasize gang tackling.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Try to get a lot of reps. Coach on the fly and spend minimal time in the huddle.
- It's ok to have more than one player standing at a given position.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Place five cones down to represent the five interior offensive linemen and assign extra players to serve as the offensive skill positions. The coach can play as quarterback. You will need three or four coaches scattered around the field on the defensive side of the ball. Prior to practice, create note cards with common formations, the formations of your upcoming opponent, or special formations that may give you trouble such as an unbalanced line, empty backfield, etc. It is best to use a letters for each position on the card and assign each of your scout players a letter (Billy is 'T', Jack is 'F', and so on.) Show the card to the scout offense using as little time as possible, break the huddle, and check the defensive alignment. Make sure each player is lined up correctly and knows what to do once the ball is snapped. You may place a man in motion to see if the defense can react properly if you like. Make any corrections and hurry back to the huddle for the next rep.



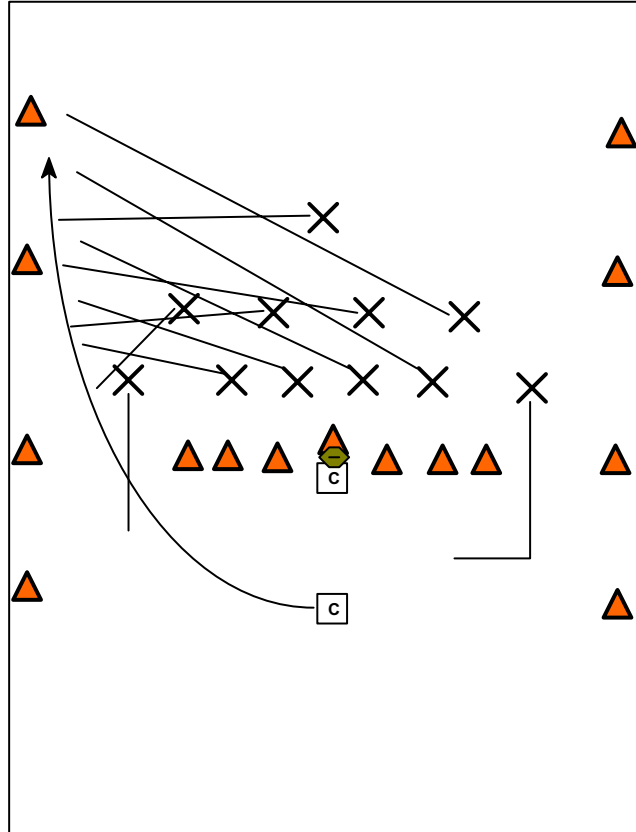
## 84. Angle Pursuit

### *Purpose:*

- Practice taking the proper angles against outside runs.
- Condition.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Make sure players are out of the way as they return for the next rep.
- This is a lot of running for the coach. You may need to switch off with another coach.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

Thanks to Scott Gettier for showing me this drill in 2006. We have done it weekly and I think it has helped prevent at least a dozen touchdowns since then. Set up cones for sidelines and also to represent the offensive players so that the defenders know where to align themselves. It's best if you have two defensive groups that can rotate after each rep. You will need one coach to act as quarterback and another coach, who is in good shape, to act as the runner. On the snap, the first coach will pitch the ball to the other who will execute a sweep to one sideline or the other. All defenders must take their proper pursuit path and cross in front of the ball carrier's face. Be careful not run any of your players over or, in some cases, not to get run over by them. For some variety we may add QB fakes, passes, or reverses as the season progresses.

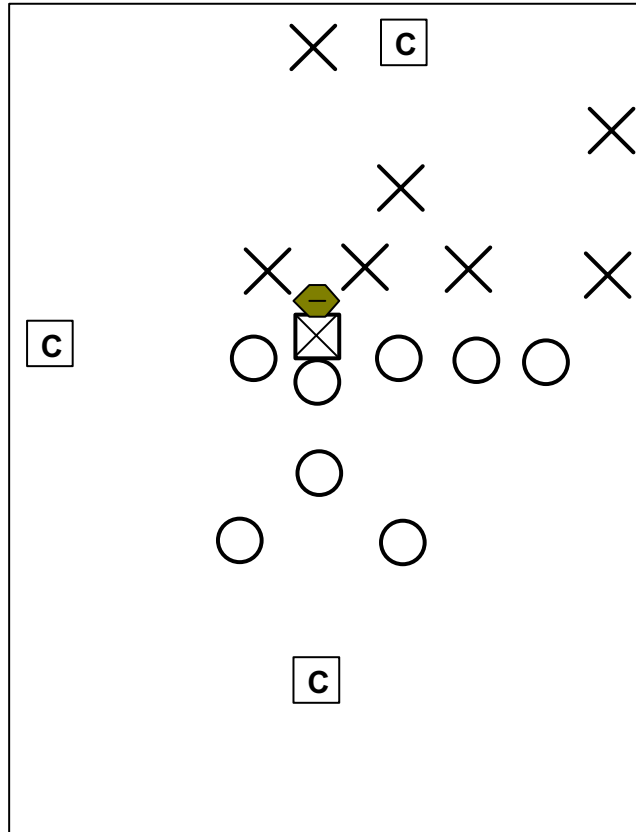
## 85. Half Line Scrimmage

### *Purpose:*

- To practice your offense and defense in a live situation.

### *Coaching Pointers:*

- Try to get as many plays in as possible. Coach your players on the fly.
- Rotate halfway through or every other day so that everyone has a chance to play both offense and defense.



### *Set-up and Instructions:*

This drill seems to work better for some groups of kids than for others. In 2004 I was an assistant coach on a team that participated in half-line scrimmages for a half hour at each practice. It was a great opportunity for the kids to learn in a game situation and for us coaches to instruct on the fly. My 2006 team never seem to get the same benefits and we eventually stopped scrimmaging altogether. The greatest gains will come if you have two capable coaches – one whose area of expertise is on the offensive side of the ball and another who is able to concentrate on the defense. Our 2004 team practiced three days each week. On the first day we would only use our own offense and defense. On the second day, we would run our plays against the expected defense of our upcoming opponent. On the final day of practice, we would look at our opponent's plays against our defense.