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# **The Word of Lawson**

## **33-Stack Defense**

**Excerpts from the Double Wing Forum  
JJ Lawson Explains the 33-Stack**

(Assembled by: Scott McNutt)

## Preface

I started this collection of quotes from the “Double Wing Football Coaches Forum” so I could get some serious study and review hours in – without having to wade through pages of non-football chatter. It's not that I mind the chatter so much ... but sometimes ... usually when I'm in a highly motivated mood, I want to learn, period. So, in an effort to be more efficient, I attempted to assemble what I thought were some of the most helpful Forum posts in one place.

Unless otherwise noted, all comments contained in the following sections are taken directly from posts by JJ Lawson on the Forum (comments enclosed in a box are from others).

Hope this helps someone!

Regards,  
Scott McNutt (CoachDTown)

Forum: <http://forums.delphiforums.com/dwingers>

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## How We Win

Either way we win ... I dont ever want my defenders to get driven on the way we drive on people with our DW ... and avoiding this keeps my defenders in high spirits even when our opponents are able to score a couple of times ... and high spirits and aggression will take you a long way on the defensive side of the ball ...

You may give up the same 8 TDs in the air this year ... and 7 of them might go to TEs ... but if it is one each game and you end up going undefeated, will it matter ??? 8-)

Eventually, the pressure gets to everyone and we can count on the following ...

1. When we have the better athletes, it will be a blowout because we will jump on them early and often ...
2. When we have equal athletes, we always win ... sometimes it is closer than others but we havent lost a game in the last 4 years where we had equal talent ...
3. When we have lesser talent, we can keep it close and give ourselves a chance at a victory ... this has worked many times for us ... but of course there are games when they are better and we lose ... in those games, I have yet to go back and watch tape and think that if we ran something else we could have won ...

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... one common mistake of Offensive Coordinators seeing our defense for the first time on the field is when they refer to our DOGs as Corners ... and that is actually a big deal because the things that an OC will try to do against a Corner wont work against a DOG ... you cant run him off with a wideout ... you cant beat him with a halfback pass ...

## Committing to the 33-Stack

My honest advice is this ...

If the HC and DC arent 100% on board then dont run the 33 ...

This is a defense that is aggressive and requires 100% commitment ... much like the Double Wing ... if you dont commit to it all game every game then it wont work ... it takes a little time to get the kids attacking the way you want them to ... it takes the right set of stones to watch that early play action pass go for a long touchdown and come back out the next series in the same defense ... so if anyone isnt on board 100%, they will want to bail on the defense too quickly and that wont get you anywhere but running something you didnt practice enough while the best youth defense available is sitting on the shelf ...

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So far everyone that has used the 33-Stack as instructed and committed to it ... those guys are all reporting great seasons ... kids love this defense, fans love it, coaches love it once they see it wreak havoc on some poor opposing offense ...

But everyone who has tried to use it part time ... or guys that are noncommittal and want to change little things ... or guys who try to force feed it to the other coaches on their team ... those guys are all having less than perfect results ...

This is a contrarian type scheme and really doesnt mix well with other defenses ... it also doesnt mix well with coaches who dont want to attack and dictate to the offense ... nothing wrong with those type of coaches ... plenty of success has been had by guys running 'bend but dont break' type defenses ... you just cant run this defense that way ...

There will be an instructional video ... but honestly it is kinda on the back burner right now ... I officially have too many irons in the fire for the time being ... but it will happen ... someday ... 8-)

## Why it's Unique

Actually, my 33 uses the LBs to act like Dlinemen and put pressure on the backfield ... but my study of the 3-3 has led me to understand that the 'threat' of multiple blitz packages is what actually confuses the offensive linemen and keeps them off the LBs ... the threat of blitz keeps the line at the LOS guarding their area instead of moving to the second level ... I dont think that many defensive linemen in the 3-3 actually force double teams that arent in place as part of the blocking scheme for a specific play ...

Anyway, I understand ... I still prefer terms like Gap Responsibility or Attack Angle to the 'run fit' jargon ... but more importantly, I am just damn glad that my kids dont have to learn all that other stuff to be effective ... reading different run situations and reacting differently would fry my kids brains ... I dont want to see any smoke coming from their ears ... I just want to see them flying into the backfield creating havoc ... its much more fun that way ... LOL

What I am saying is that a ONE GAP defense like we run has the 'run fit' built into the scheme ... we are putting a defender in each A, B & C gap immediately after the snap ... it doesnt take long for most teams to stop calling plays in the middle of the field ... there are no gaps to run through and no reads for the LBs to make ... they simply fill their gap on every down and work through that gap and get after the football ...

Now if there were no O-linemen then I could see the problem you are describing about guys all running straight at the ball carrier and leaving cut back lanes to run through ... we dont see much of that ... I cant say never because overpursuit can occur when one or more of our guys get through totally untouched and they have their eyes closed ... but for me that is not a 'run fit' issue ... it is a missed tackle due to an inability to find the ball quickly enough ...

I will say that we do work on our DOGs about attacking the upfield shoulder of the deepest man coming at their side to keep the ball carrier inside ... this is what we call our 'attack angle' but it sounds very much like your 'run fit' ...

## The Basic Idea

Basically, right after the snap, your 6 Stack players should be filling the A, B & C gaps on both sides of Center ...

Then your DOGs should be working from outside in simultaneously squeezing the D-gap down and keeping that upfield shoulder free ... acting as 'force' and 'contain' and basically being in position to stuff any type of 'bounce' play ...

The CORNERS should have made their Run/Pass read by now and if there is no pass threat then they are backing up the DOG ... I had a truly phenomenal kid playing this spot for me this year and he really did a great job backing up a somewhat undisciplined DOG ...

And finally the REAPER is attacking from inside out when he reads which side the bounce is going to so that whenever the DOG turns the runner back inside, he will be there to crack him viciously ...

We got run over slowly this year in a few games by bigger stronger kids at the LOS because we were forced to stay in a 4-2 look with both LBs 3 yards off the LOS ... that took away a good amount of our pressure and also made it very difficult to stuff those interior gaps like we normally do ... but we shut down pretty much everything to the outside all season long ...

Then I took the All-Star 'B' Team and after only 1 practice on defense we went to my former park and held their DW to only 1 score on a play where the acting referee blew the whistle with the ball still in the backfield on a WB COUNTER and we allowed the score as the kid came out of the fray and ran untouched down the sideline ...

Had a walkthru the next night to talk about mistakes and proceeded to win both tournaments we entered over the weekend shutting out 2 opponents and holding the other 2 to only 1 score in regulation ... throw in the 4 OT victory over a school based team from Jackson MS that hadnt lost a game in 3 years and outweighed us on the line by 40 lbs per man and I love this defense more than ever (if that is possible) ...

## Staying in Base

I just know how well it works ... I know that someday, somewhere I will run into a team that we should man up against ... but so far that hasnt happened ...

I have been on the sideline for too many games where my STACK players are hitting the QB in his 2nd step from under Center ... so I will admit to being somewhat skeptical when someone tells me that they will spread us out and hit the open areas in our zone coverage ... not at the youth level (subtle dig at Mahonz) ... I really do believe that if a kid is talented enough or well coached enough to make that happen with our pressure then he will also be able to sit in the pocket and beat our man coverage with no pressure if we back off the number of guys attacking the backfield ...

All that aside, we teach the PRESS call ... and for a change of pace we might call it ... but ... well ... umm ... ok nevermind, that wont happen ... at least not until that passing team comes along that proves they can throw against our zone ... LOL

## Two TE's and a WR

I'll take a shot at this ...

First, you should never have a SE and TE on the same side because the TE wouldnt be eligible to catch a forward pass ... a SLOT or a FLANKER or WIDEOUT is a different story ... but lets assume that we are talking about a Pro I or Split Backs with 2 TE's and a SLOT receiver ... that way the QB gets max protection and you still have a wideout who can stretch the field to allow that TE to sneak underneath ...

E . T . G . C . G . T . E

.....Slot

...H..Q..H

OK ... I think this a pretty cool set to run from if you want to pass and run zone blocked rushing plays ... and I think if my defenders all just stood in their original alignments that you could run a clear out and be successful ... however, I am pretty sure that if our boys saw this one time it wouldnt work again after that ...

#1 - if the QB is showing pass then the DOG has the flat and thus he has coverage on that TE who is running the Bench route ...

#2 - if the TE runs a route then he isnt blocking our edge rusher so that is 1 free through the line of scrimmage that must be blocked by one of the HBs ...

#3 - if the SLOT is running a clearout route then he is obviously attacking vertically and our standard CORNER alignment and assignment should cover this guy with little trouble (unless he is just better than our kid) ...

#4 - so if both routes are covered, the offense needs to do something a little different ... what about releasing the TE down the field ??? Well, our REAPER reads the QB so if he showing quick pop pass then our REAPER should be attacking that TE as he catches the ball around 4-5 yards ... the REAPER is aligned at 8 and moving forward and the TE is looking back to catch the ball ... this is gonna get ugly ...

#5 - ok back to the drawing board for the OC ... he needs to do something that shows run so that our REAPER and DOG dont cover so quickly on the preferred TE routes ... PLAY ACTION ??? OK, play action is just as dangerous for us as it is for any other defense ever devised and as near as I can tell the BEST way to defend play action is with MASSIVE PRESSURE ... and for the offense to fake a running play they will lose one or both of those HBs who are picking up our blitzers when they come free ... so if the offense wants to lose that blocker then our guy coming off the edge where the TE vacated should be on top of the QB really quickly (play action passes take too long to get off without great protection) ...

OK ... lets stop for a minute and see where that leaves us ...

POP PASS & SKINNY POST - covered by REAPER and not much of a threat to a 33 team in zone coverage

WAGGLE & FLAGS - usually in combination with play action and these routes take way too much time against a max pressure defense

OUT ROUTES - covered by the DOG in the 33 zone coverage

Now I understand that we wont always make the play and sometimes the badguys are better than us or at least lucky enough to make some things happen but this defense is truly a learning defense that the kids are able to adjust on the fly and stop the plays that work early in the game ...

All of the above is what I have seen running this defense for several years ... and it was all covered by the base 33-Stack that we run 99% of the time ... but what happens if the offense is still able to consistently get the ball to that TE ???

OK, we are getting beaten by a free releasing TE ... good news coach ... we can pretty easily teach our DT and OS that whoever has the C-gap responsibility (depending on the 'tap' of the OS) should just jam right into that stud TE and keep him on the line ... we can even teach an MPP type kid to cross block this TE so that even if the TE knocks him down, odds are the TE will trip over him or it will slow him down so much that our pressure should again be successful ...

Let me end this with a couple of tips ...

#1 - We LOVE shotgun offenses ... I find my kids get more penetration and they get it quicker when the QB is visible and there is little doubt what he is doing with the ball ... a QB spinning or backpedaling from under Center is a tougher read and the rushers have a much harder time reading where the ball is going ...

#2 - PRESS is a call strictly for spread teams who spread out 4 or even 5 receivers so they can throw the short pass quickly ... PRESS is designed to take away all the quick routes by jamming receivers at the LOS so that once again the pressure has time to get to the QB ... I would never use PRESS against a 1 or 2 TE formation unless MAYBE if they sent all 3 running backs out in a trips look and kept hitting a bubble screen or something like that ... we just use our BASE defense against these type of teams and turn our strongside DOG loose on the trips package and blitz that backside DOG to force very quick hitting plays ...

I guess it would be easy enough for me to tell you to have that OS just jam the TE and play it that way but I dont believe for a minute that you will need to resort to that ...

## Coverage vs. Spread

You suggest man coverage against a spread formation.

ONLY if the spread formation proves to me that they can get those quick passes to players at the LOS before we can smack the QB with the HUGE RUSH we will get when they spread out ... the only reason I suggest the man coverage at this point is to place a defender ON the receivers to take away that quick pass ... but quite often those teams that spread out cant even get a pass off with all the pressure we place on the QB ... remember when those Tight Ends widen out, our OStackers tap outside and move up on the LOS ... they are now rushing FREE from about 6-8 feet away from the QB ... if he backpedals at all we will be on him ... if he is in the shotgun, we will be on him as he catches the ball sometimes but if not he will see us coming and it takes a helluva kid to stand in there and deliver the ball against that type of rush ...

Do you stay zone against a single slot formation? (slot, se and a TE on the opposite side of the field?) If so could you elaborate on how you defend a quick pass to Slot or SE?

I think you are talking about a SLOT on the TE side ... and a SE on the opposite side (because if the TE and SE are on the same side, the TE wont be eligible) ...

Anyway, we absolutely stay in our BASE coverage against this type of team ... the quick pass is defended in combination by the DOG and CORNER ... it is all about time and space ...

CORNER - align over the #1 receiver to your side ... read that receiver as you move forward and cover your zone or fill to play the run

DOG - align by splitting the difference between the outside receiver and the last man on the los ... unless this distance is under 5-7 yards and then we will just line up ON that receiver ... sometimes we even bump him if we can get away with it ... read the QB and then play flow so if the QB pops up for a quick pass cover your zone, if not you play the flow by attacking the deepest man

So I am sure you can see how we are aligned against the formation ... lets talk about the reads we get and the reactions those reads force ...

DOG - QB pops up and begins quick pass to your side ... you know there is a Slot or SE (doesnt matter which) so you move to intercept a bad pass or hit the receiver right as he catches the ball ... it is tough for a QB to get control of the ball, set his feet and throw it 12-15 yards much quicker than our DOG can run 5 yards so he should make the tackle against anything at that range ... of course maybe they are throwing to the wide side of the field and it is a 20 yard throw against an 8-10 yard run ...

CORNER - #1 receiver turns toward the QB to catch the 'quick' pass as we are moving toward him ... this tells us it is a 'quick' pass ... we are deep enough that a pump fake and go route doesnt scare us

because we can adjust ... so we can aggressively move forward and attack this play ... again it will be very tough for the QB to get control of the ball, set his feet and make that throw much quicker than we can get there ... bad throws can be intercepted (not as often by the CORNER but we definitely get some by our DOGs) ... good throws get a net of a yard or a loss of a yard because we have a couple of tacklers to make the play once the receiver catches the ball ...

The above reads and reactions also defend BUBBLE SCREENS ... remember it is a time and space issue ... we arrive when the ball arrives ... and if we arrive with bad intentions that receiver wont want to catch the next one at all ...

If not could you share the man rules for the TE side of the field.

PRESS rules on the TE side are pretty simple ... assuming the same formation from above, the CORNER would man up on the SLOT receiver and the DOG would man up on the TE ... I might be oversimplifying this so if I didnt answer your question please ask again ...

## Defending the Drag

I will take my chances with the PRESSURE ... teams use 7 to block our 6 all the time and the numbers advantage isnt quite what it sounds like ...

However, I will easily admit that the DRAG route is one of the toughest routes to defend in football but it takes time to develop ... if the QB throws it too quickly it ends up being more of a POP PASS ... the TE must clear the line and get into the route ... and you have to remember that he is the #1 receiver on that side of the formation so we have a CORNER reading him from the snap ... so he has to get across the middle of the field before he is 'uncovered' ...

Something else that takes time is running off our CORNER and REAPER ... remember they arent in bump coverage at the LOS ... they are 8-10 yards off the LOS and running them off takes a little time ... and the longer the play takes to develop, the longer those blockers have to hang on against our rush ...

Even with split backs staying in to block, the QB will be in a world of trouble when we get 2 guys free on the same side ... and as much as I hate to sound like someones dad ... it will happen because I say so ... LOL

Seriously, even teams that keep both TEs in to block will always allow at least one guy to get through because of the blitzing ... now if you release those TEs, that means that both C-gap blitzers get through freely ... quickly ... that means we should have 2-3 guys in the backfield every attempt ... if the QB allows the route to develop long enough to be effective, he will be forced to throw under pressure or from his back ...

And we can still jam both TEs if we feel 'compelled' to do so ...

Compelled = Offense completes a couple of those passes against us to prove that we need to adjust ...

We can also have our MIKE drop into a middle zone that will cause that play some problems and it will

take even longer to develop ... 8-)

## Struggling with the Dog

I struggled with the DOG position, but I feel confident about them now.

It is easily the toughest position to play in the entire defense ... but I think most coaches are overthinking it a little bit (not necessarily you, I am just adding to the conversation) ...

I bet I spend twice as much time explaining it to coaches than the kids who actually play it ...

For me this defense is all about being simple and aggressive and confusing to the offense ... you are dead on about the little guys causing havoc in the backfield and I will be honest when I say that sometimes they would be better off laying in the gap and making a pile but most often they end up being the most important guys on the field ... because ...

The pressure they put on the backfield always ends up causing one or more of the following to happen:

1. Confusion - everyone from the Oline to the Off Coordinator
2. Forces the offense to use all 7 linemen (TE to TE) and they all block down to shut down the gaps - we dont mind because now they cant run inside and they cant get blockers on 5 of my best kids - we can also start looping our OS players outside and around the whole pileup once they give up running inside giving us 7 unblocked defenders
3. Coaches losing faith in players and yelling at kids - kids losing faith in their coaches chosen scheme - you can imagine what this does
4. Coaches feel the pressure to make a big play and they call those Sweeps and Reverses that we WANT to see and we start making even bigger plays
5. If it isnt Sweeps and Reverses, they decide to try and throw the ball more - now the pressure is harassing the QB and our zone defenders have easier reads because they 'know' the pass is coming just because of an increase in the quantity of pass plays the coach calls

From Gumby:

I see some of the other posts and it looks like it's easy to overthink the entire defense. To me, it's by far, the simplest defense I've ever encountered. I'm only guessing, but I think the DOG position is a little out of the box for most guys. Normally, the DE is the contain. Since the dog is a OLB/DE hybrid and he doesn't use a "traditional" contain technique (box or slide), it can be confusing and a little intimidating. To have your contain guy crash and trust the pursuit requires a leap of faith.

It is a little different but I think most of the 46 guys should understand it alright ... the technique is very similar to what their DEs are doing albeit from a different starting point ... they crash and trust their LBs to flow to the ball and make plays ... we crash and trust our REAPER & CORNERS and the inside

out pursuit to make the play if he misses ... both defenses use the same aiming point and the same ripping inside arm technique ... the biggest difference is our DOGs look for and defend the pass first ...

I guess the alignment subtleties (hard to explain without going through every offensive alignment known to man) are really what makes the DOG position hard to understand ... to me they seem like 'common sense' based on his reads and assignments ... but for guys who haven't run the defense I guess they are not always so 'black and white' ...

You cant underestimate the importance of having the right kid playing DOG ... he has to be flexible in his skill set ... he has to make quick AND correct reads so he knows where to be and how to get there ... and he has to have a certain 'awareness' of what is going on with the offense so he can keep from getting cracked or taken out of position or sealed inside, etc. ... its not an easy job and to further complicate your search for the 2 kids who will play the position ... the DOGs also have to be pretty athletic ... decent size and speed ... high HIT SCORE types ...

From Gumby:

As I think I understand it now, I want them attacking on the first step, reading the QB and being aware of anyone that lines up in or heads to the flat. As soon as he reads pass, he makes a beeline to the flat. If he reads run to his side, he's going to attack at a 45 degree angle to the deepest man in the backfield, keeping his outside arm free and not letting the ball get outside of him. He has to take on lead blockers with his inside shoulder while fighting to make sure the runner stays inside or at least runs the bubble. If he reads pass to the opposite side, he trails the deepest man in the backfield, looking for reverse.

Everyone attacks on their first step and yes the DOG reads the QB for quick pass plays ... and yes he must be aware of any receivers who lined up wide or any receiver attacking the flat area ...

If he reads run to his side, he immediately attacks the deepest back leading or running the ball ... the angle he takes isnt going to be 45 very often ... the player he is attacking is probably moving toward our DOG or toward the sideline so the angle must be adjusted on the move to cut off that deepest player from reaching the sideline ... we teach that DOG a ripping technique with his inside arm much like a 46 Defensive End would attack ... it resembles a series of uppercut punches as he 'rips through' each blocker who attempts to seal him or slow him down ... this technique definitely requires some drilling ...

And finally yes, if he reads run going to the other side of the formation, then he will follow slowly at the depth of the deepest man and look for bootlegs, counters, QB throwbacks and reverses ...

And remember that anytime we blitz our DOG and someone splits out to his side, that is our cue to call off that blitz so he can play the quick pass ... so if he is actually attacking the backfield, then there probably isnt a pass threat so if he doesnt appear to look for pass too much it is probably because there is little to no threat of pass to his side ... when the DOGs truly understand this, they begin to 'blitz' all day ... not really a called blitz but they begin to attack all the time and to some people it looks like my DOGs are just blitzing all day when they are just ultra aggressive because they have learned how to

read what an offense is threatening them with ...

## Automatics

We use 'automatics' infrequently at best ... the one that seems to happen most often is the 'No TE' rule ... basically anytime a team lines up with only a G & T on either side the OS on that side will tap outside and step up on the LOS tight to the DT and blitz hard off the edge ... that one works all year long ...

All other 'automatic' calls are based on scouting and totally depend on YOU the HC deciding how you want to attack someone ...

Perhaps you want your kids to SLANT hard toward motion against a specific team because they run to the motion man all the time ... you work on your kids tapping and then when they see motion they disregard the taps and slant hard to motion ...

Other examples are in the playbook ... all the blitzes and stunts can basically be used as AUTOMATICS if you choose to do so ... the whole list is things you CAN do but not things you MUST do ... we install very few calls each year ... and they are always based on something we know about the offense ...

Does this leave you vulnerable to a counter? [Automatic Slant]

YES and NO ... it really depends on the counter ... and it depends on your scouting ... if you go to the SLANT page of the manual you will see that our backside OS doesnt blitz at all when we 'slant' ... he stays home looking for counter off tackle and the backside DOG is at home looking for counter outside reverse or bootleg ...

The other part of this equation is whether or not the team runs any type of 'counter' at all ... many guys run JET SWEEP and their only counter is a playside dive or trap (covered by slant technique) and an outside reverse (covered by DOG) ... if you pick this up in scouting then I would send the backside OS as well ... LOL

MORE PRESSURE MY PRECIOUS ... MORE PRESSURE ...

From Mahonz:

Ever considered auto blitzing the edges? No #1 the CB comes...no #2 the Dog comes. TE is never considered a #1 so against the DW base the corners are always coming. What I like about this is that it gives the offense another thing to worry about from this defense. By formation the auto blitz is either on or off. I fiddled with this when we ran the DC46. It works well for the 33 too....and probably a few more defenses.

I have thought about it ... in fact we have done that with our DOGs on occasion ... but the truth is I call so many DOG blitzes AFTER the offense breaks the huddle and lines up that it wouldnt really matter ... it isnt really an autoblitze per se ... but it sure acts like one ...

As for blitzing the CORNERS, that wont happen ... you gotta remember the difference between what we do in our 33 and what most other 33 defenses are doing ... our CORNERS are playing Safety/Cover-2 ... there is ALWAYS a #1 receiver the way we teach our CORNERS to read the offense ... starting from the sideline, the first eligible offensive player is #1 ...

That can be a split end ... a slot ... a tight end ... or even a tailback or fullback depending on the formation ... but our CORNER is only using this player as an alignment point and a read for pass or run ... so we wont be using any 'autoblitzes' by our CORNERS ...

But we will do this with our DOGs from time to time ... it is mostly a gametime or scouting decision ... stuff like blitzing the weak side DOG against the Wing-T when we shift to strength ... that is an 'autoblitz' for that game but not every week against every team ... I also blitzed the backside against a JET team once to catch their counter in the backfield ...

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The second scenario is much easier to deal with due to the split out TE ... that is an auto call for our OS on that side to move up on the LOS and go hard and go now ... get to the QB (often before the poor kid can backpedal away from Center) ... we would still use our ZONE look until they proved they could do some damage ... again the REAPER and backside CORNER would shift and look like a Cover 2 and once again we probably blitz our backside DOG quite a bit ... the pressure we put on a formation like this is HUGE ... we normally get 1-2 kids coming free in Max Protect with both TEs ... now you are moving one outside and giving me a free lane as well as showing almost no threat to the weakside so I can bring that DOG ... if only 1 stack player beats his man we have 3 guys chasing that QB pretty quick ...

From Gumby:

I was thinking the same thing for the Split End, putting the OS on the LOS and just launching him. I see your point about the pressure in all scenarios. Don't adjust to what might happen. Make them prove they can complete that pass first.
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We make that call for ALMOST every offense we face ... when they split out the TE, we autoblitze our OS from the edge ... we teach them to change their tap and walk up on the LOS just outside the Tackle so they are as close as possible ... then with the DT attacking inside the OT, he is forced to step down and this leaves the lane wide open to the QB ...

## For Those that don't Like Zone

As for guys like REED not liking zone coverage ... I have found that most of the guys who tell me they dont like it are guys that really either dont understand it or dont teach it very well ...

Same goes for players ... those who dont like it usually dont understand it or dont do it very well ...

The bottom line is to get 6-8 guys pressuring the backfield and one run stopper playing the middle of the field basically REQUIRES that you run some type of Cover-2 zone ... you arent allowed to use 15 defenders ... LOL

For what you are wanting, the original 33-Stack Attack document should suffice nicely ... it explains the defense about as well as I can ... the changes to the 2nd Edition will be small and important but not life altering ...

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From Coach Wade:

The important thing to remember is not that "Kids CAN play zone," because it's obvious that they can. The big one, though, is to consider the amount of practice time necessary to teach specific aspects of football.

Kids at ANY level can learn to pass, block, tackle, and even run complex plays and schemes like the option. The question isn't whether they can do it; it's whether YOU can teach it in the amount of time you have to get it done.

Anyone that can consistently teach a triple option attack to seven year olds will crush and dominate his league. I'm not, however, holding my breath to see it.

At some point there is a law of diminishing returns; where the amount of practice time needed to teach a player to become proficient at a skill exceeds the amount of practice time available for that skill. At that intersection, the skill is no longer applicable to football.

Zone CAN be like that. JJ's zone ISN'T, largely because of the pressure he puts on the backfield. Truthfully, I didn't understand it until I saw some of his video at the Symposium, but in several cases his defensive backs are not really "in position" on the ball like a true "disciplined zone" team would be. (Not that they are undisciplined or playing badly by any means.) What's happening, though, is that the quarterback is under so much pressure to get rid of the ball so fast that he throws it up for grabs. Quite a few of the interceptions made by JJ's teams could have been fair caught.

I am a proponent of zone defense, provided it can be taught in the time allotted for practicing defensive back play. If it can't be, for whatever reason, then MTM is the better choice.

From Coach Gregory:

Here is my take on zone...

- 1) You are defending a piece of field (may vary depending on passer's front shoulder location and his location on the field). Grass is not fast...it is not athletic..it is not bigger...it is not stronger...it is grass...it is your grass.
- 2) The more athletic you are the bigger the piece of field you can defend...and there by lull the passer into throwing a "safe" throw...because you can eat up space as the ball is in the air.
- 3) When the ball crosses the LOS you defend the ball doesn't matter if it is in air or on the ground...get the ball.
- 4) Set your zone to take away the most common routes. That is specifically why I set mine for 8 yards and outside (inverted CB)...because the most common routes for youth football are the post, corner, go, hook, and slant...all of those but slant break on or around 8 yards...that allows the corner to cushion his backpedal and play the deep routes to the ball as he defends his grass.
- 5) Basic DB and MIKE - you sink until the ball is in the air...period...never let a receiver get behind you ever (CB's).
- 6) OLBs if they sniff pass they drop until the QB sets then rotate to the direction of the QB's front shoulder/facemask...
- 7) If you are backside or away from the QB's front shoulder slow roll looking for Bootleg-Counter-Reverse (BCR). Never rotate fast until you see the ball in the air.
- 8) If the ball is in the air...everyone go after it...period.

In man especially press/bump it comes down to how athletic and how strong your defender is compared to the receiver... You are defending an athlete and the ball...in zone you are defending a piece of field and the ball...

I have twists on this...like the ROBBER call to the MIKE that tells him to drop as if he is a backer making our coverage an actual COVER 2 instead of a TAMPA COVER 3... along with a few other minor calls...like MAN and PRESS and COVER that allow us to change up how coverage.

As for the youth zone ... guys who claim it wont work are thinking of traditional zone ideas that drop 6 or 7 defenders into zones where they stand around and watch the world go by ... the other problem is that kids are very literal so if you teach them that 'this' is their patch of grass, you can pretty much count on them not touching a guy who is 1 foot outside that patch of grass ... so you end up with 6 or 7 kids who are standing around watching the play and not engaging with the bad guys ...

The 33-Stack is sooooo NOT a typical zone package that it is hard for me to argue with those guys ... because I agree that you can NOT run a typical zone defense with youth teams ... not reason to commit that many guys to defending 4 plays a game ...

## Coaching Zone

From Jack Gregory:

Zone is not hard to teach...but you can't teach a NFL/College version of zone...it won't work because it is too hard for kids to grasp the bump and release and defending specific routes. Instead you place your zone to cover the deep/vertical threat and position/locate them where the most common routes will break and drop at...once you do that your DB's just need to learn to keep dropping until the ball is in the air and rotate to the passer's up field shoulder/facemask...now depending on how athletic/quick they are will determine how much space they can give up and still get to the ball... I can find that out real quick with on drill...then one more drill to teach them how to cover space and ball vice receiver and ball...

The easiest thing you can do is defend space and the ball...defending a player and the ball is more complicated and it requires a player with the same or better athletic ability to cover in man..don't ever let anyone tell you different...that is a fact... I played DB and LB in HS and semi-pro you can't expect a lesser athlete to play man (no matter if it is press or safe) and expect that defender to stay with a better athlete. But you can teach a player how to defend space and play the ball...especially since very few youth level QB's can throw a very accurate technically sound ball...most are pop ups or they arc to high...this gives you time to have zone defenders break on the ball and make a play on it. It also doesn't require you to play seven defenders in zone either...due to the nature of youth passing...the reality is if you use 2 to 3 defender to form an umbrella to cover the deep areas and then force the offense to prove they can pass to the perimeter and vertically you can then make some simple adjustments but first make them prove they can do it and bring pressure and see if they can 1) protect the passer, 2) have the passer get the ball to the receiver, 3) the receiver catch the pass...until they can prove they can do it I believe you can play a soft rotating zone with pressure in front...then once they prove they can pass you can adapt to playing some under zone or even move into a man coverage concept...

## Helpless on the Sideline

I can honestly say that in 4 years, there has only been 4 times that I have felt kinda helpless on the sideline ...

1. We were aligned wrong the entire first half and couldnt stop them off tackle ... we had a more talented team and won the game 26-12 or something like that and we shut them down in the second half when I replaced the kid lining up wrong ... it was a DT lining up on the Guard and he was on the far side of the field the first half so I couldnt see his alignment until I looked at film ... funny part is that the other team apparently didnt see him either because they only ran off tackle to his side every other play or so ... with the success they were having on that side, I would have run there 20 times in a row ... but then I guess we would have replaced the kid quicker too ... LOL

2. & 3. Both teams had far more talent, size and speed and we were just kinda bullied ... both these teams played us in the same year and both would meet each other as undefeated opponents in the championship game ... we gave the 'runner up' absolutely no trouble in the 2nd game of the season and

they spanked us pretty good (only time in my DW coaching career that we didnt score on offense) ... however, by the playoffs we were a much better team and lost 34-20 to the eventual champions ... in this game we just couldnt tackle the 2 fastest kids in the league (tailback and quarterback combo) ... both games boiled down to us having trouble tackling their ball carriers and then late in the first game we were being blown out and the kids got downhearted so everything they did was working in that game ... the playoff loss was mostly about their QB beating us to the corner ...

4. Maybe it was simply a size issue in this last game but this team was patient enough that they just kept taking their 3 yard gains in their double tight Wishbone ... they must have made 10 fourth down and one yard to gain attempts in that game and we lost 18-13 with our offense on the field at the end ... we never got that one big stop in the second half of the game and they 'double winged' us into submission ...

Now we have lost a couple other games but it was never an issue where we felt helpless or anything ... and we dont lose very often ... 8-)

## It's not Crashing or Pinching

That is why I dont like to call it crashing or pinching ... because guys have the wrong idea about what we are doing ...

Most of what I would say is in Jack's post ... but I would add that in the 33 our DOGs are coming from farther outside than a normal DE and honestly they are almost impossible to LOG ... they are aiming at the deepest back so they are past the depth of a FB pretty quick ...

As for you 'wanting' your DE to box so the scraping LBs can get there ... all I can say is that if we can seal the near backer for just a second most decent runners can step inside the kickout block on the DE and right back outside toward the sideline like a sweep ... that circumstance is why so many coaches yell SWEEP when we run TOSS ... because they see everyone else slip inside their DE and then bounce outside for big gains on sweep plays ...

Forcing the runner to run 'over the top' will allow those same scraping LBs to run him down into the boundary ...

Jack's Post:

The reason why it is tough is as that DE comes across the LOS he is also going inside or behind the offensive line. He is eating up as much ground as the FB. Now lets say your FB attempts to log him...that DE is going key on the lead blocker now (the near back). He is going to make every attempt to cross that FB's face (near/outside hip) and force the runner to dip under his lead blocker or cut it back inside.

The difference is we force that runner to make an IMMEDIATE DECISION on where to go and thus make it instinctive. In the case of a boxing end the end's movement is fixed and thus predictable...the crash end is predicated on the backfield and thus varies based on how the backfield moves...he is going into the backfield every play but the angle of attack depends on where the near/deep back's

outside hip is going.

Bear in mind that our defense has defenders sitting inside as well but we want that runner to see the sideline...dip deep under the DE and if he can get by (big if) then he just gave up ground behind the LOS to do it. Meanwhile your pursuit (in the case of the 33 the bandits and safety) are now in full pursuit closing ground towards the LOS heading towards the runner while the runner is running away from the LOS and towards the sideline... In the case of the 63 my MIKE and Bandit and if I am in compress my OLB as well.

That runner is basically being driven to run flat or away from the los and towards the sideline or cut back into the teeth of the defense...all within a split second... Bear in mind most TB's instinct is bounce it out and let me out run the defense... The defensive end is the lure in the trap...it appears he has the field but to get to the field he has to give up a huge amount of real estate behind the LOS to get past that crashing end...all the while the pursuit from inside is closing up space from inside out and towards the LOS... Even really good backs have a hard time making a cut and going vertical once they commit to a flat east-west direction... We simply bait them into doing what they want to do in most cases and then take it away.

The thing with a boxing end is once you get him kicked out and you lead on the perimeter defenders that runner is going vertical not horizontal...which makes it easier for that runner to stop and cut or bounce once he passes the DE on the inside...if the DE didn't squeeze enough as he capped off his box that could leave that OLB and CB isolated with a huge amount of space to cover with a runner going vertical... I would rather have a runner going east-west with space to cover then north-south with space to cover...because I can eat up most of that space as he goes east-west knowing that the sideline is an extra defender (contain)...

I really like the DE play a lot better because it allows us to be aggressive and still play solid perimeter force and contain and force the runner to go east-west outside or cut up into the teeth of our defense...

## Motion

One of the benefits of staying in our BASE look as much as possible is that 'should I go or should I stay' question about motion is answered ... we dont want to chase motion unless we are in PRESS coverage and then we are in a true man-to-man situation and would have to follow motion ... something else to remember is that everyone uses motion differently ... for some it is to determine coverage ... for others it is to get a numbers advantage ... for others it is to reposition a potential receiver or ball carrier ... and still others use it because it looks cool and makes the parents believe the coach knows what he is doing ... LOL ... I want to know what the motion is doing before I decide what to do about it ...

## More on the Dog

Actually the DOG should read the QB first ... its a quick read based on the quick passing game ... if the QB pops up for a quick pass the DOG reacts accordingly ... if the QB does anything else (turn, spin, handoff, toss, etc) then our DOG should begin attacking off the edge to squeeze down the D-gap and force wide running plays to either run very very deep in the backfield or force them to turn inside where the pursuit is coming from ...

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DOGS do NOT read a receiver unless it is a running back flaring out of the backfield ... DOGs read the QB to nearest back ... QB for quick pop passes, pass drops to nearest back for running plays or flare passes ... again there will be more in depth answers in the new playbook ...

## Blitzing the Middle Stacker (MS)

When you say not to blitz the middle, I assume you are referring to the MIKE or MS (middle stack) ... and for many defenses I would agree ... but not the 33-Stack ...

In our 33, our MS player is usually about the 8th, 9th or even 10th best kid on the field ... hell in years where I have real defensive linemen he is the #11 kid on defense ... his whole job and his whole purpose in life is to blitz ... the type of kid I usually have at this position wont sniff that athletic QB's fumes if he tries to chase him sideline to sideline ...

That is why I mentioned that my OS (outside stack) guys would be taking the C gap or open end of the formation so they can contain or chase down that athletic QB in an empty set ... they are often top 5 defensively and can be the best 2 athletes on my team on occasion ...

Either way we would definitely play Micheal Vick differently from how we would play Peyton Manning ... if you get my drift ...

And you know, honestly, that runner would have to prove he could throw the ball against our BASE set before I would freak out and start calling PRESS or SWITCH or whatever else ... I truly believe in our BASE defense's ability to dominate passing teams ... it has done the trick so far ... I do know that it would work differently at the HS level but fortunately for me I dont run this at the HS level ... I think I could with some modifications but this is a youth level defense for now ...

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Our MS is usually a MPP type who cant pursue that well so we let him continue blitzing just like he always does ... but our OS players are usually a little better athletes and against athletic QBs in spread situations we have them blitz off the edge of the C-gap (happens automatically if there is no TE anyway) ... this is our way of containing that QB ...

## Defending Against Twins

I think that starting in BASE and then if you need to you can go to PRESS & SWITCH ... that should work well for you ...

As DC, I disagree with you and them ... if a team comes out in a simple TWINS look, we stay in BASE because that is easily a running formation to the TE side and they are giving us quick and easy pressure from the TWINS side ... our DOG on the TWINS side will have to decide if they are lined up close enough for him to jam someone and still play contain ... if not then he should split the difference and read that QB for passes to his flat area ... teams will try to bubble screen you from this look but if your DOG is a player he will blow that up pretty quickly (his inside out angle means they will have trouble blocking him with that other receiver) and the CORNER is reading and moving forward so he will be there pretty quickly based on his read ... by staying in BASE, you get the OS on the open side to the QB really really quickly so they dont have time to throw anything slow or complicated ... it has to be quick, quick, quick ... this is an advantage for the defense because we know what type of pass they have to throw from this look ... and we can do all of this without weakening ourselves on their strong running side ... needless to say WE LOVE TWINS formations ...

If the TWINS look is on the TE side that might work differently ... you would have to tell me about the rest of the formation ... but about the most we do is to SHIFT to the TE side and blitz our backside DOG off that short edge ... again we have an advantage on both sides of the offense in this scenario and we like offenses that play this way ...

## Defending Against Common Offenses

Any FULL HOUSE backfield - 33 BASE or 33 GUTS if we feel like they are no threat to pass or if it is short yardage or goalline

- \* FULL HOUSE T
- \* WISHBONE
- \* Stack I
- \* Power I
- \* Offset I

Any Passing Formation we will start in BASE and take a look at what they do ... one key to point out is the auto blitz by our OS when there is no TE on their side ... you will get that out of most of these passing sets ...

Double Slot - We definitely run 33 BASE against this with both OS backers auto tapping outside and coming hard off the short edge ... our DOGs are trained to adjust their alignment based on how far out the WR & Slot are lined up ... but our CORNERS still align 10 yards off the #1 and we play this just like a double tight look except our kids know the passing threat is more dangerous now ...

ACE - We will again run 33 BASE with our DOGs splitting the distance between TE and Slot ...

Trips - You might think we would do things differently with Trips but honestly we do not ... the only real threat in my opinion is a Bubble Screen and we have 4 defenders coming pretty quickly with 1 having inside leverage (DOG might even pick off the ball) ... 1 having outside leverage (CORNER is outside #1) ... and 2 coming hard on really good inside out angles ... REAPER probably cheats over to the Trips side a little because that is the threat and the OS (and every other stack player) is flowing to the ball from inside out ... we see a lot of Bubble Screens when teams figure out we are playing zone but our DOG being a stud and our alignment really do a great job against these slow (youth level) passes ...

Quads - same thing as the Trips above except now we might slide our OS out there if they prove they can make that Bubble Screen work ... but this is basically the same formation in our mindset ...

You will notice that nothing really excites us formation wise with this defense ... and the reason is simple ...

Even a MAX PROTECT scheme with 2 TEs will almost always allow at least 1 of our blitzers through ... so we almost always get pressure of some kind ... now when a team wants to go Trips or Quads or whatever other goofy shit they can dream up ... when they want to do that they are still bound by the 11 players on offense rule ... so to overload any area of the field with players means they are LOSING those blockers ... either TEs or RBs that stay in and protect ... one or the other or both must go out and become TRIPS or QUADS ... now we get massive amounts of pressure ... and the badguys cant even get the ball thrown on anything except a shotgun bubble screen and even that is under pressure from our edge rushers ...

Man we piss our pants from excitement when we see a Double Slot team ... we have our 2x2 coverage built into our base alignment and now we get 2 guys coming free off the edges because you think you can block 6 with 5 ... typical schemes maybe ... not this one ... both of my OS will be coming full speed off the edge and your ONE runner must decide which one gets to hit the QB ... HEHE ... usually their mind freezes and both my guys hit the QB ... LMAO

Serious business man ... take a minute and draw up 5 or 6 different passing sets ... then take a look at our rules ...

NT on the #4 from the sideline ...

DTs on #2 from the sideline ...

OS/MS stacked behind the front 3 ...

CORNERs 10 yards on outside shoulder of #1 ...

DOGs split difference between last man in the bulk of the formation and the Wideout ...

REAPER in the middle ... shading strength ... but reading QB and playflow to get where the ball is going as quickly as possible ...

Draw up the defense based on the rules (best way to learn is to practice) ... then draw pursuit lines of the unblocked studs ... then draw pursuit lines of the studs who only see 1 blocker ... then look at how the runners have to bounce outside because the interior is clogged up ... and look at how they have to cut back inside because one of our best kids is outside working in from a great angle to do his job ...

When you find the formation that has us 'outflanked' on the edge or 'overpowered' in the middle, let me know ...

I guess you can work backwards and maybe come up with something that might hurt us ... but how many of your opponents know your 'alignment rules' ... they see you sitting in that base zone all day and they figure they know how to beat you with a flood pass or a bubble screen or a jet sweep or a reverse ... or whatever ... it just isnt going to happen that way ...

## Pressure

Jack Gregory:

DE, OLB, and CB in most defenses by alignment already have outside leverage...or the ability to get into and maintain outside leverage. The reasoning behind using a pressure method of outside-in is to place immediate pressure on the runner...this eliminates the ability to go to full speed...he has either turn the ball back inside or go away from the LOS to get by the DE that is forcing the play NOW. When that occurs he is having to cover more distance to get to the LOS and thus you allow your defenders to close on him as they have a shorter distance to cover. It is not a very hard concept and I have used it time and time over the years with lesser talented kids and it works....football is not an individual sport all the pieces have to work together in order for the defense to work...defense is about reacting and covering space but having a scheme in place that defines those reactions helps to alleviate the talent disparity.

As far as zone goes that also comes down to coaching...and how you teach it...most parent coaches teach it as fill this space and play the ball...there is a lot more to it then that...like all things in football it takes coaching to get it to work.

Jack Gregory:

To me pressure ends and zone defense is better...that is my preference. Pressure leads to sloppy passing and zone (covering space and the ball) allows you to make plays on those balls. I don't agree with the notion that man requires more accurate passing at the youth level either. Zone played properly is very tough to throw against if you are teaching your secondary players to rotate to the passers view...especially when they are being pressured because the time window to get that ball off is very small which limits the passers ability to alter his read dramatically...you play contain with your ends you cannot put immediate pressure on a passer...but when you use pressure ends the entire backfield is under pressure to include the QB...it simply is not an easy thing to over come for many offenses at the youth level.

I run a 63 and I use pressure ends and zone defense and I defend the perimeter pretty well mainly because we focus on forcing plays to go east-west as much as possible and for as long as possible whether it be the passing or running game

## More About Dogs (or DE)

Jack Gregory:

My feeling is, based on my own personal experience, that I want my end to come of the ball and get into the backfield and place pressure on the backfield. Your example of the toss can clearly illustrate this as I have seen it happen time and time again. Lets say you are in a FLANK I with double tight ends...and the flank is on the opposite side of the toss (really doesn't matter but for this example). The DE seeing no RXR wide will align about 2 to 3 yards wide (enough to not be reach by that TE) and he might bump out a bit more to cover any speed difference between him and the back. On the first movement he sees (near TE or ball) he is going to come off the LOS and into the backfield aiming at that near hip of the tail back (and keeping on track with that to maintain outside leverage). The FB leads out to attempt to block the DE so the end to maintain his track to the near hip of the tail back rips under that FB's outside arm. Now bear in mind I don't care how fast your tail back is he still has to get the ball from the QB on the pitch so for at least 1 second his eyes are not on the DE...but the DE's is on the tailback...and that is a big difference because it means the DE already has the tailback's near hip locked on by the time he is fully accelerating and the DE is already in the backfield at least 2 steps and even 3 to 4 steps prior the the TB gaining any real speed. By eating up space you limit the space the TB can operate in and you force him to make a decision much quicker then he is used to making. If he does get by the DE on the outside he did so going away from the LOS as he goes towards the boundary. If you train your kids to play the perimeter properly that is a big advantage to the defense ... that OLB, MIKE, and CB can now all come up and play the ball...MIKE coming from inside and across the LOS, BSDE coming from the backside and behind the LOS (on path he was already on) and the OLB and CB coming up and squeezing the runner from the outside towards the sideline...even if you are stunting your OLB you still get contain from your CB because he is in zone. Zone is a better pass coverage to play when you want real run support from your secondary. Man coverage gives you limited run support from your secondary especially if the offense knows you are in man...they don't need to block you they simply need to threaten pass and move your defenders away from the LOS...they can't do that as effectivly when you play zone.

## Mahonz on the Stacks

Mike Mahonz:

If you really want to be successful with this D then you must relentlessly drill the full taps stack. You dont have to use it 100% unless you coach bobbleheads but this is what makes this D scary good.

Your DL has to attack thru their gap with great rip or swim moves. He must attack right into the hip of the lineman that is next to the lineman he is covering so hard that if that man were not there your D-lineman would fall flat on his face.

Your TNT must attract a lot of attention. They are not pluggers, crawlers, readers, reactors....they are flippin' missiles. And if they are not first off the football, punish them. Encourage credit card depth and put up with the encroachment calls that will hit you early in the season. Your TNT will figure it out and get it right. Stance is a low 3 point sprinters stance with the power hand high and behind them. Which hand is the power hand depends on the direction of the tap. First step is always with the back foot and the power hand is on the same side....so going left right foot right hand back....opposite for going right. Rip power hand comes underneath...swim is over the top. Second power step squares the shoulders. Dont attack the gap with sqaure shoulders....thats what linebacker do. Third step sets the flow. NO BULL RUSHING !. Skinny fat attack.

Your linebackers must play so close up on the D-linemen that they are nearly leaning on them without tripping them. This also helps them tap without the OL seeing it even if the DL changes his stance to accomidate the backers tap. The backers are not linebackers when playing taps...they are d-linemen so they must attack with power steps and power hands but a little differently. Stance is upright heels equal but slightly on their toes tits over the knees hands off their thighs knees bent. Their first power step is with the same side foot to the gap they attack but their second step must be long and hard to maximise forward lean and keeps them low. Both hands get thrown up and forward looking for conatct. This keeps them sqaure to the football. Third step sets the flow. They too attack the near hip of the O-linemen next to gap they are attacking. they are not so concerned with getting skinny becuse they are not shootin the a gap as quickly as the TNT but they are coming like a missile too.

More times than not your backers are the ones coming free but you never know so all 6 positions must be coached up to come in real hard and then flow. You will notice at first your stack will run right by the football if they irresponsibly attack....unless they get lucky but you dont want to count on that.

Everyone must have their head up snap to whistle. They must all key the deepest back. They must take two hard power steps and on the third flow to the football. If they never get in a third step then they have drawn the double team...A GOOD THING ! They must all stay in an alley that flows to the football. This takes away the counter alleys. They must be as skinny as possible when ripping or swimming and then get fat as quickly as possible after the power steps. Getting fat is getting square ASAP. The backers must mix up their taps. Sameness is death. We let the backers freely tap...it is mathmatically impossible to leave a gap unfilled is you align 404....and slide that 404 for the funky stuff like UBSW. They must use their hands and attack. They must get their hands up for pass so all 6 better yell "pass". They must communicate in the huddle with the man they are stacking with.

If the O-line pulls the TNT stays right on their hip and spikes the play. Yes I have seen one team pull their center. Great player. This is hard to do for the TNT but must be perfected especially as the kids get older and see more traps and the like.

This is accomplished with a ton of indy work on the bags and in groups of 3 and 5...1 defender on 2 O-linemen...2 defenders stacked on 3 O-linemen. I have no problem with kids standing idle watching stack drills. Its a visual thing for most. Some kind of get it right away others come along more slowly. These drills must be done all season long and something you dont want to rush through and call good as the season progresses. The stack is what makes the world go round for this D. It takes time to perfect a rip / swim move. It takes time to get 6 flowing properly. It takes time to teach keys. It takes time for each stack unit to gel. It takes time to learn O formations and tendencies. Even if the kids are really young they must learn what why and how they are defending.

Dont get yourself all caught up in moving this group through drills with everyone staying busy. This is one group that can go along at a slower pace with plenty of stoppage for coaching along the way.

And of course...plenty of tackling drills with the rest of the team.

If you can pick 3 really mean kids to play the TNT. That helps a lot. We encourage ours to softly chatter among themselves while ready to attack off the football. Lets the OL know these three are a little off center and not right. We practice this. One kid in particular just quietly humms to himself. That may send even a better message. All part of playin' in the trenches....if only their mothers knew what goes on in there....yep...they would freak.

Must have an attitude to play D and it all starts with your stack. Drill attitude everyday...there are about a 100 ways to do that. My favorite is one on one instant tug of wars using a twisted beach towel with a duct tape wrap....who is gonna be the bad ass today. We have 4 towels and go through a process of elimination. Winner gets to be the next game captain. We only have one on defense. If the same kid keeps getting it then so what. Wanna be a captain....step it up with the attitude. Tug of war has nothing to do with height weight or strength....its smarts with heart. Just like wrestling.

Dude, that was a great post ... I will admit that early on I didnt realize the importance of the STACK players in this defense but over the years it has become apparent to me ...

First let me ask if it is ok to put the majority of that information into the next 33 manual ... I dont mean copy and paste but certainly some of the ideas are yours and not mine so I wanted to make sure it is cool ...

Second, I wanted to point out some things we do a little differently but they are minor:

1. Our STACKERS are aiming at the hip of the linemen they are stacked off of ... so our OS on both sides are aiming at the hip of the Offensive Tackle they are in front of and our MS is aiming at the Center's hip to the side he is blitzing ... our reasoning on this is that the TNT front

will be pulling those 3 guys away from the gap our STACKER is blitzing so that hip has to move and this keeps the STACKER as far as possible from the Offensive Guard or Tight End on his path into the backfield ...

2. Also, our OS and DTs are aiming for the deepest back but our MS and NT are aiming for the spot where most Fullbacks line up ... this is where the QB will be after 2 steps and most of the times our MS and NT make a big play they end up tackling the QB on his drop or the FB right after the handoff ... so we aim a little differently with those guys ... but they still pursue the ball just like the other STACK players do when they get to the backfield ...
3. I agree that early in the games it is the STACKERS who are coming free most often but my experience is that the longer the game goes on, the more yelling the O-line coach is doing and the more the linemen start getting after the STACKERS and then the TNT guys start making more of the plays ... once I prove this to the kids ONE time, that is all the motivation they require to play hard the whole game ... but you are 100% dead on about the fact that you never know which guy is going to come free to all 6 need to be 'balls to the wall' on every play ...
4. My last point of contention is the TNT stance issue ... I have never tried it your way so I am not declaring that it doesnt work ... I just always thought it might be a tell by age 9 or 10 and might hurt our chances so lately I have been trying to get all my TNT guys into 4 point stances rocked back on their heels so they can basically 'frog jump' to either side into the gap they are rushing ... this is a very fast technique for coming off the ball and draws a ton of attention from the O-line ... it also helps to hide the tap and gives absolutely no tell about which way they are going ... again I dont know how well your stance works because I have never used it but I know that the frog stance works really well for us ...

After that, I love everything you listed and honestly you can count on seeing it in my teams from here on out ... I love this defense ... damn I love it ...

## Defending Against Trips

Coach, we dont position any differently against a Trips formation ... we are a ZONE team until the offense PROVES they can beat us throwing the ball ... not knowing what kind of trips team you are referring to makes it a little tougher still ... I will just assume that you are referring to splitting out the TE and sending 2 of the backs out there with him ...

The Trips side being the strong side would see:

~SS DOG split the difference from the OT to the closest of the Trips receivers and get up close to the LOS ...

~SS CORNER would align 10 yards off the LOS over the outside shoulder of #1 ...

~SS OUTSIDE STACK BACKER would find no TE on his side and tap outside and move up on the LOS (this tap tells the DT to slant hard to the B gap taking the OT with him leaving the Backer free off the edge from about 8 feet away from the QB ... chasing hard on option if the QB pauses in his read or dances at all we will catch him from the backside ...

~REAPER would probably shade over toward the Trips side unless we knew about the Weak-side Option Game ... but assuming we have never seen it before he would shade his alignment a few steps toward the Trips ...

~WS DOG would be autoblitzing as he has no responsibility now ... he is aiming for the deepest back (only back in this set) and he would take him out on any option play forcing the QB to run ...

~ WS CORNER reads the #1 (TE in this case) and when he blocks down on the STACKs, our CORNER would fill the lane and tackle the QB as he turns the corner ... the REAPER would be right behind him because he reads the QB and chases the ball ... after a play or two of this our REAPER would no longer cheat to the Trips ...

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Against any sort of pass attempt ... check the above descriptions, we would have a blitzing DOG from the weakside and OS Backer from the Trips side both unblocked at the LOS ... the lone running back must choose one or the other (OS is closer but he is at least on the front side so the QB can see him whereas the DOG is coming from the blind side) ... anyway, 2 unblocked defenders means the only real threat in the passing game would be bubble screens or similarly quick throws ... this would be a dead give away read for my REAPER who would be flowing to that side and attacking from inside out ... so while they might complete a couple I dont see them getting much more than 5-8 yards before our 3 man triangle gets past the 2 blockers and makes the play ... once we see this play a few times the DOG starts reacting a little quicker and the CORNER as well and before long it is only getting a few yards ... we actually have seen this in a game last year where a team drove on us throwing Bubble Screens for most of the 1st drive and they even scored (on a running play) ... but their next possession our boys figured it out and started hitting the receiver as he caught the ball and we ended up shutting them out the rest of the game ... 4 OT Championship Game it was a lot of fun ... but I digress ...

The passing game must be very quick with my unblocked guys coming very very fast ... if the QB holds onto the ball or tries to show some type of run first, we will surely get to him before he releases the ball ... so our pressure forces the offense to throw to guys who are 'underneath' our best players and we make some tackles ...

We do have a PRESS call we can go to in case the offense proves they can and will take their 3-5 yard gains on Bubble Screen all day ... but we only use it as a last resort (noone has forced us to yet) ...

By the way, all of the above is assuming that my STACK players arent doing diddly except playing in the grass ... we are usually able to get at least 1-2 of them free on most plays even against double tight end looks, due to the blitzing we employ and the offensive line not knowing who to block from play to play ... extra-specially on passing plays ...

## Cornerback Reads

I want my CORNERS to play pass when those receivers run 'fake' pass routes ... otherwise they will get burnt by some kind of HB Pass or Play Action ... besides I equate this to trading pawns in Chess ... they are running a player away in order to take one of mine away ... but if you are playing a 2 Deep concept like I think you are, then when this happens your CORNER should be backpedaling as soon as he reads pass and staying deeper than anything ... now at some point he is a safety if he ever gets the chance to 'peek' and finds that the ball has crossed the LOS ... he might still have a shot at making the play ...

My REAPER is absolutely a MLB more than a SAFETY ... if he needs to move 2 yards closer then we move him up ... whatever it takes ...

If that QB is in the gun, is the team also in a 'spread' type formation or are they in a 'tight' formation ... because this is where that 'trading pawns' concept tells me that your front should be making the play ...

If the offense is spread out and the DOG reads pass then he should have some receivers out in his area and he must stay in his zone ... but if this is the case then your front 6 are outnumbering the blockers and should get pressure on that QB ...

If they offense is in tight and the DOG has no one in his area then he has no reason to play his zone so he should be pressuring the backfield looking to hit any runner that comes his way (potential flat receiver) all the way until he gets to the QB ...

Dan82564 (Dan):

The problem I get into is that my CB's are 2 of my 5 best players and when they get run off by a average player it isn't a even swap. My dogs would either get drawn out into their zone by a slot back or TB, my reaper would have to make the openfield tackle by himself and even when he did make the tackle they would get 4 or 5 yards.

I guess what I dont understand is that when your CORNER is running off based on #1 going deep ... and your DOG has a slot to contend with, why isnt someone coming free off the edge area ??? The offense is running out of possible blockers by 'running guys off' ...

Now if the DOG is dealing with a RB, he shouldnt be backing into his zone at all ... a RB is treated like a running play and he should be attacking the edge and knocking that RB on the ground ... at least this is how we do it ... so we get a run force from the DOG ...

The scrambling QB now either turns inside (closer to our pressure guys) or he must run deeper so that our CORNER and REAPER have plenty of time to run him down before he can gain any positive yards ...

Honestly I am not sure if your defensive changes are 'why' they only scored 8 points in the second half ... since they had such a good lead they may have let up mentally ... of course the change in and of

itself might have been why ... but not because it is a better course of action but instead because the offense was attacking you in one way and they were successful so when the defense changed then they should have changed their attack ... if they didnt then shame on them ...

And maybe I just dont see enough athletic QBs but we never have that issue ... our CORNERS are usually top 5 but that can be changed if someone is using inferior talent just to run them off ... we can always switch someone smaller and less important back to CORNER and put our better kids at the OSB spots and call RED so they read the backfield action and flow to the football ...

Jack Gregory:

This is were I and JJ do things differently. I want my DB's backpedaling for three steps no matter what there first three steps are always backwards so if it is pass they are already flowing vertically so that there is no chance of a receiver betting them deep. Otherwise a speed type receiver will beat your DB because he has to stop redirect, and then gain acceleration vertically and that can get a DB beat if the receiver is faster then your DB and can cover that cushion up as he reads... That is my take does not mean that the way JJ does things is wrong it is just the way I do things. There primary job is PASS first...let me say this again their primary job is PASS first and they are the only two defenders in the base defense that key PASS FIRST RUN SECOND...but I feel if I don't have at least two defenders splitting the field in half protecting against the vertical threat that we are open to the BIG PLAY and I will not allow my defense to be open to that threat.

With that being said the DB's have to be drilled into making that read into the backfield and making a decision. I tell my DB's if a receiver is on your side to drop quickly and keep that cushion open so that you can get a good CLUE on RUN and PASS...once you confirm no pass threat is ON YOUR SIDE PLAY RUN...

We drill it, drill it some more, drill even more, and then we drill it a lot more. At first your DB's will be keyed on never giving up the deep pass and that means they will come up to run support (CONTAIN) slow but honestly by mid season (1st year) they will start becoming more confident on their reads and will come up much quicker to support run as they become confident in reading the backfield and the QB.

1) CB drops and the get that three step cushion quickly and if they have a veritcal threat they must keep that cushion and keep looking into the backfield and adjust to the QB's FACEMASK... They should eat up ground and if that means they take 10 steps to figure it out then so be it...but they never give up the vertical pass.

2) IF the QB drops as if pass both CB's drop vertically and key that FACE MASK...front side keeps dropping and backside rotates inside slightly as he sees FACE MASK AWAY. Now if it is a draw or a delay that is not the CB's job...in all honesty that is the DE's coming off the edge and the front six...delays and draws should never get off if they are doing their jobs.

3) If the QB is dropping and looking a the perimeter and running draw or delay to that side (I have had two teams do this) and your DE drops to cover the flat and the run is getting off you need to make sure your STACKS are actually penetrating and locating the ball... IN doubt I will call GAP from the sideline to get my OLB right in the C gap and put some immediate pressure on the backfield. I will also call FIRE to tell the DE to ignore his QUICK PASS KEY and just get into the backfield.. The mix

of those two tend to stop that stuff.

4) Now play action and roll outs are lot easier for both CB's in my opinion....all they have to do is play PASS FIRST and then confirm run.

5) Run to the perimeter is easy to key and react to...it will be the fastest keys your CB's will pick up on because they can see the ball...but make sure they know that if the RB runs flat or deep to maintain pass coverage if a receiver is in space...HB PASS...otherwise attack and contain. After a while the CB's get how to key on this.

6) Run to the off tackle is a little harder but it is the second easiest run key because as the tunnel opens the CB on playside can see the ball and come up and support it...with HALF LINE drills it becomes very easy for them to defend this key. Because I really stress for my backside CB to CAP this allows us to cover up the deep vertical front side as the BSCB confirms no threat of pass on the backside as well. This allows our FSCB to be aggressive. The big thing here is for the DE's and front six to do their jobs.

7) Run to ISO/LEAD is a little more hard because it is now pointed at the B gap vice C or D gap in the cases above. The big key here is for the front side CB to make sure there is no vertical threat and if not come up and support from outside in...if not he maintains pass coverage. Again DE's and Front six must do their jobs.

8) Run to DIVE or WEDGE are very simple because they hit quick...often these are couple with misdirection actions so we tell our DB;s play pass first and confirm the location of the ball.

The big thing Dan is communication...the DE's have the best view of the backfield I stay on thier butts about shouting out RUN (meaning the ball is coming at them), SWEEP (meaning the ball is going outside of them), PASS (meaning the QB is throwing)...these three things are always coming out of my DE's mouth...if not we get on them about it... My MIKE and front six are also told if they see the ball to do the same thing. That really helps to get your DB's flying up to support.

I will not hesitate to call SKY and cut my CB's distance in half to get them into run support faster if we figure out their passing game is not to be feared or they are throwing to perimeter more than vertically.

The big thing is to be consistant in your drilling.

I am gonna do a little exercise in compare and contrast here ...

1) CB drops and the get that three step cushion quickly and if they have a vertical threat they must keep that cushion and keep looking into the backfield and adjust to the QB's FACEMASK... They should eat up ground and if that means they take 10 steps to figure it out then so be it...but they never give up the vertical pass.

We are different on this but from what I can tell only in the first 3 steps ... we arent running forward for 3 steps either ... we are moving slowly forward at the snap ... looking to see if the #1 is releasing or blocking ... if blocking we continue to move forward and play the run ... if releasing (no matter what he is releasing to do) we are backpedaling and playing pass ... once we start to backpedal we are doing basically the same thing ...

My question is HOW DEEP are your CORNERS at the snap ??? Mine are deeper than most based on the fact that we are moving forward slightly ... and like you go on to say near the end of you post ... once we decide that the pass is not to be feared we will move them up some to further pressure the running game ...

2) IF the QB drops as if pass both CB's drop vertically and key that FACE MASK...front side keeps dropping and backside rotates inside slightly as he sees FACE MASK AWAY. Now if it is a draw or a delay that is not the CB's job...in all honesty that is the DE's coming off the edge and the front six...delays and draws should never get off if they are doing their jobs.

We dont see the QB drop or at least we dont see the first couple steps because our CORNERS are reading the #1 receiver ... but once we read pass then as we backpedal we are looking for face mask to our side of the field and playing the ball ... and I agree 100% on the front 6 being responsible for delayed running plays ... my CORNERS will help against the run but only when there is NO pass threat ...

3) If the QB is dropping and looking a the perimeter and running draw or delay to that side (I have had two teams do this) and your DE drops to cover the flat and the run is getting off you need to make sure your STACKS are actually penetrating and locating the ball... IN doubt I will call GAP from the sideline to get my OLB right in the C gap and put some immediate pressure on the backfield. I will also call FIRE to tell the DE to ignore his QUICK PASS KEY and just get into the backfield.. The mix of those two tend to stop that stuff.

Our DOG only drops if there is a pass threat to his side ... for instance against a Wishbone team or some formation where no wideout is on his side, the DOG will play run and hit any back trying to release out into the flat area and knock him down ... so we dont get any wasted drops by our DOGs ... on occassion a couple of teams have tried to slip a TE out into the flat area behind our DOGs after a wideout goes deep to draw off the CORNER ... we just remind them when there is a wideout they must honor the pass if they get a pass read against those teams ... but a team that has no wideout wont be doing any damage by slipping that TE out behind our DOG because the CORNER is reading the TE ... so we are a little backward from each other on this aspect ... you call FIRE to get your DE to play how mine play from start and I have to remind mine occassionally to play how your DE is playing from start when we do find someone with this type of play in their arsenal ...

4) Now play action and roll outs are lot easier for both CB's in my opinion....all they have to do is play PASS FIRST and then confirm run.

Agreed ... very easy ... my guys are playing pass until such a time as they no longer have a pass read ... play action always results in a pass read the way we teach the reads ... that is why we dont let our CORNERS look into the backfield until they already get their Pass/Run read ... to avoid being fooled by play action fakes of the QB ...

5) Run to the perimeter is easy to key and react to...it will be the fastest keys your CB's will pick up on because they can see the ball...but make sure they know that if the RB runs flat or deep to maintian pass coverage if a receiver is in space...HB PASS...otherwise attack and contain. After a while the CB's get how to key on this.

Perimeter runs must be paired with one of two actions ... either the #1 is blocking from the snap to help get the runner outside ... or he releases to run off a CORNER ... if the first then we are backing up the

DOG and containing the play ... if the second then we are running with the receiver and trading pawns ...

6) Run to the off tackle is a little harder but it is the second easiest run key because as the tunnel opens the CB on playside can see the ball and come up and support it...with HALF LINE drills it becomes very easy for them to defend this key. Because I really stress for my backside CB to CAP this allows us to cover up the deep vertical front side as the BSCB confirms no threat of pass on the backside as well. This allows our FSCB to be aggressive. The big thing here is for the DE's and front six to do their jobs.

Run to the off tackle (or any inside run) is about the same for my guys as any other play ... against a double tight type of team our CORNERS help out a lot against off tackle plays because they get a quick read on the TE blocking ... but against teams that spread out a receiver we end up playing safety more than anything because very few receivers are disciplined enough to run that route deep enough to run us off but they do release off the line so our CORNERS play pass ... in this situation if our Pressure Group is doing their job then all the gaps are filled and the run will end up bouncing outside or falling down on the pile ...

7) Run to ISO/LEAD is a little more hard because it is now pointed at the B gap vice C or D gap in the cases above. The big key here is for the front side CB to make sure there is no vertical threat and if not come up and support from outside in...if not he maintains pass coverage. Again DE's and Front six must do their jobs.

Same as #6 ...

8) Run to DIVE or WEDGE are very simple because they hit quick...often these are couple with misdirection actions so we tell our DB;s play pass first and confirm the location of the ball.

Same as #6

This may sound a little hokey but we do our best to play the run with 12 kids and play the pass with 6 ... our REAPER pulls double duty against both types of plays but that is why we put our best kid there ... or if you split the field in half we have 6 on each side to play the running lanes and 3 on each side to play the pass ...

We dont expect our CORNERS to make too many plays ... they often do but we dont expect it ... the most important thing they can do is play the pass ... and they do get burnt on occassion ... often early in a game ... when they are still peaking too quickly into the backfield and not 'reading' the #1 ... but once they get burnt once they rarely get burnt again by the same team ... this is why I tell guys to expect several teams per season to smack you in the mouth early ... just keep the pressure up and eventually it will wear down the offense and your boys will learn with each passing play how to shut down what they want to do ... this is the true genius of these 2 defenses ... unless the talent difference is tremendous both of these defenses can learn as they play and by the second half of most games the offense has no hope ...