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# **Defensive Football**

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John H. McAvoy

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of the School of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfillment
of the
Degree of Master of Arts

Western Michigan University August 1968

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Dr. George Mallinson for taking time from his busy schedule for assistance with this thesis.

The help given me by Frank "Muddy" Waters, of Hillsdale College, was tremendous. He provided some of these new ideas in college ball which are stated, for the first time, in this thesis.

I would like to thank Doctor Kolivosky, the Academic Dean of Hillsdale College, for encouraging me to write this thesis and finish my master's work.

I would like to thank Coach John Ray, the defensive football coach at Notre Dame University, for giving me the opportunity to study defense under him for three years.

John Henry McAvoy

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# CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF DEFENSIVE FOOTBALL

About the middle of the nineteenth century, a modification of the Rugby game was introduced at Yale by an
undergraduate who had previously been a student at Rugby.
At about the same time other seaboard colleges in America
learned about the game and hence it began to appear
gradually as an interclass and interhall contest. These
activities were the genesis of modern football.

The first recorded intercollegiate game in the United States was played November 6, 1869, between teams representing Princeton and Rutgers. In 1872 representatives of Princeton, Yale, Rutgers and Columbia met in New York City and adopted a set of rules which formed the first intercollegiate football association in America.

The evolution of the Rugby game into the form in which American football is now played took much time as well as deliberation and experiment. Prior to 1895 the rules did not stipulate how many players were required to be on the line of scrimmage when the ball was put in play. Under these early rules the flying wedge was developed as a feature of the offense. In this formation all players except the snapper-back might be back of the line of scrimmage and in motion when the ball was snapped. This

led to the development of momentum plays in which injuries were frequent. Consequently, in 1895 the rules were amended to forbid momentum-mass plays. In addition a number of institutions agreed among themselves to require five men to be on the line of scrimmage.

After a year of experimentation in 1896 the rules were revised. The revisions provided that five men were to be on the offensive line of scrimmage and players were prohibited from taking more than one step before the ball was put in play, save one man who might be in motion toward his own goal. Under these rules the old momentum or flying wedge plays were replaced by the guards-back and tackles-back plays which continued for a decade until the game was revolutionized in 1906.

Modern football was ushered in by the wholesale revision of rules in 1906. It had been demonstrated that
previous legislation against mass play was not sufficient.
Injuries continued; criticism increased. In fact, the
existence of football as a sport in schools and colleges
was seriously threatened. Those interested in preserving
the game decided that radical changes were necessary. They
determined first of all, to eliminate all momentum plays
for the reasons indicated by Hill<sup>1</sup>:

"Plays of the type of the flying wedge and V

Hill, Dean, Football Thru The Years. Gridiron Publishing Company, 1940. P.46.

were extremely dangerous not only because of their structure, but also because the mass formation was under way high speed when the opposing players met."

It was agreed that a new type of football should be devised, in which speed and skill should be the dominant factors. Obviously, this could not be accomplished immediately as evidenced by the fact that it has taken about sixty years of experimenting, criticizing, and adjusting to develop the modern football game. However, it was in 1906 that the fundamental principles were established upon which our modern game has been built.

The rules prohibiting forward momentum before the ball is snapped have been revised frequently and each time have been made more strict. The forward pass rule has also undergone numerous changes since 1906.

In 1910 the game was divided into four periods from the previous two. In the same year seven men were required to be on the line of scrimmage. In 1912 the fourth down was added. With the seven man stationary line, ten yards in four downs and the forward pass as basic requirements, numerous experiments have been tried for a better balance between offensive and defensive strength, even further to emphasize speed, skill and intelligence, and to safeguard the players more adequately from injury. Since the first objective of defense is to prevent the opponents from scoring, it follows that any defensive plan must first be designed to prevent one big play, the easy touchdown.

It is impossible defensively to separate the theories of defense against runs and defense against passes. The two must blend and be mutually self-supporting. If the defensive team knew before the ball was snapped whether the play would be a run or a pass, the defensive task would be only half as difficult. However, generally the defense has no way of ascertaining this fact until after the play begins. Since passing is the truly lethal weapon of the offensive team, the defensive backs should always play for a pass first and then for a run.

The one play, long pass touchdown, is to football what the overtime basket is to basketball. It results in a easy score for the offensive team. If the pass defense is adequate and can contain the offensive team well enough to keep it from throwing the touchdown pass, the elements of a sound defense are present. If this cannot be done all the time, the defense will never be completely adequate.

From the theoretical standpoint, in order to prevent the easy score, the defensive team must contain the offense. Containing the offense means that the defensive team deploys and moves in such a manner that is always keeps the ball inside of some member of the defensive team. If this can be done the one play breakaway touchdown will be prevented.

A considerable portion of the defensive team must be devoted to this containing phase of play. If the ball is

to be contained laterally on both sides and kept in front of some defensive players a reasonable number of men, usually four or five, must maneuver on each play in the proper manner to accomplish the objective. With four or five men devoted to containing the offense, the remaining six or seven men probably will not be capable of stopping every play at the line of scrimmage, and the defense will be soft for a straight ahead, quick, hard hitting attack. However, these short gains seldom result in touchdowns.

Mathematically, factors tend to favor the defense if the single-play long-gain touchdown is prevented. Most offensive teams can put the ball in play only eight or ten times without making some kind of mechanical error. The most likely errors of the offensive team are fumbling the ball, having a pass intercepted, being penalized or a missed assignment.

Most offensive teams can avoid these errors the first few times they put the ball in play, but fatigue or carelessness may become a factor. According to Huff<sup>1</sup>:

"Modern defense has developed to such a high degree of technical excellence that it requires as much teamwork and practice as offensive football. Effective defensive play depends on a cohesive effort by eleven men at the same instant. The day of the solo player is past. In college and in the pros, defenses are based on keys; that is, each man must react to the initial move made by members of the attacking team. In addition to

Huff, Sam, and Smith, Don. <u>Defensive Football</u>. New York: The Ronald Press Company, P. 16.

reacting to his own key, a defensive man should know what his teammates are doing all over the field on the same play."

As the distance to be defended in depth shrinks, members of the defensive team can be used to force the play quickly since they no longer need to drop back at the start of the play to check against the long pass. As the ball approaches the ten-yard line, the defense needs to defend a relatively small portion of the field from the standpoint of depth. At this point the containing and delaying action of the defense ceases. The team thinks in terms of forcing the play to prevent the touchdown.

To summarize, the basic theory of defensive football should be to contain the offensive team and thereby prevent the single-play, "easy" touchdown. This can generally be accomplished by keeping the ball always inside and always in front of the defense. When the ball is out of the field of play, some of the defense must drop back quickly with the start of each play to defend the field in depth against the long pass. As the ball moves toward the goal line, the area of the field needed to be defended in depth decreases rapidly. When the ball approaches the ten-yard line, the necessity for defense in depth is almost completely eliminated.

If the defense can stop the offense successfully in this confined area, it will have prevented the touchdown and thereby will have realized the basic objective of keeping the opponent from scoring.

# Personal Defensive Theory

Obviously a coach must be aware of what he is trying to accomplish. He must believe in what he is teaching. He must believe that it is the best defensive plan possible and sell his team on that idea. Knowledge and teaching are interrelated, but some of the most intelligent coaches are not always the most successful coaches.

The offensive team, by the playing rules of the game. is in a position to know when, where, and with how much strength it will challenge the defense. Having this disadvantage, the defensive team is primarily governed by what the offense does and where it does it. These statements suggest that the initiative is always with the offense. However this is true only when the defense is not willing and able to take calculated risks to provide the element of surprise. The coaches who are respected for their success in the profession are advocates of the importance of defense. However, it must be recognized that the offense also has defensive components, since control of the ball determines the length of time a team will remain on the defensive. By the same token, the defense also has offensive components since a team will have the ball only as often as its defense obtains it. The relative importance of defense and offense is thus hard to determine.

Defensive football has objectives that vary with the down, distance to gain, score, time and position of the ball on the field.

# Team Objectives

The defensive team must behave in an integrated way if success is to be achieved. The most important activity of the defense is to prevent a score. A football game cannot be lost if the opposition does not score. The defensive team must prevent its opponents from making first downs and thus enable its own offensive team to control the ball. There are of course five ways in which the defensive team can score. The team may recover a fumble behind the goal line; block a kick; intercept a forward pass; force a safety and return a punt for a touchdown.

The defensive team must be alert for fumbles since recoveries are seldom accidental. The alert team is more likely to recover fumbles.

A successful football team is most likely to have pride in its work. Team pride is a characteristic that can make the difference between winning or losing.

### CHAPTER II

## INDIVIDUAL DEFENSIVE FUNDAMENTALS

Tackling is the act by which a defensive player contacts and grasps the ball carrier to stop his progress, contacting the player with drive of body, generally encircling the upper body with his arms, and at time of contact, with muscles tense. The defensive player must literally drive his body through the ball carrier.

Tackling is the most important fundamental of the defense. This activity thus, from start to finish, must be given attention by the coaching staff every day of the season, since players are not born with this ability but must be taught through illustrations and corrections while engaged in tackling. The coach must have patience to teach properly the art of tackling and constantly correct faults.

The eight essential elements in tackling that a player must have are these:

- 1. Maintain good balance.
- 2. Keep eyes open at all times.
- 3. Center eyes on ball carriers buckle.
- 4. Encircle arm around upper body of ball carrier.
- 5. Tackle with head on either shoulder.
- 6. Drive into player being contacted with muscles tense.
- 7. Drive high and hard, keeping feet after contact.

8. Be on top of the ball carrier when crashing to the ground.

# Fundamentals For The Secondary

The halfbacks take a step out and back with their outside foot on the snap of the ball. The outside foot is back as they align themselves. The aim is to provide a quick initial move on the snap and it is believed that this stance is most effective.

The safety's stance is one with feet parallel, as the initial move depends on flow. If the ball moves to his left, the safety takes a quick step out and back with his left foot. If the ball moves to his right, he steps with his right foot.

After the initial move, the secondary men glide until they recognize the play. If it is a pass, (they are taught to assume that every play is a pass at its inception) they cover their zones. If it is a run, they take their respective pursuit angles. To teach the initial move, the shuffle drill is used. The coach executes two moves to either side, a run or a rollout pass, and the secondary reacts accordingly. If the play is a rollout pass, the secondary men glide to their zones. If it is a run the halfback to the side of flow starts up to fill, the safety starts to take an inside-out angle to fill, and the halfback away from flow starts to slide deep to blanket the entire front.

To teach against defense runs, the come-up drill is used. The plan involves an offensive end, a quarterback, and two backs on offense; and a halfback and safety on defense. First a wide run is executed, either a sweep or option, which requires that the halfback fill up and the safety fill inside out. The halfback comes up quickly, but must come under control in order to prevent a cutback.

## Fundamentals For The Backers

As with linemen, the defensive linebackers must have a good stance. A "good stance" is one in which a member of the defense is in a good "hitting" position, namely in a one-half crouch with the hands ready to ward off the blockers. However, it is less important for defensive linebackers to be in a position as precise as for linemen since the offensive blockers are farther away. Also the linebackers have a short interval after the ball is snapped to change from their original stance and assume a well-balanced position. Nevertheless, it is advantageous for the linebacker to have a good stance when the play begins.

Many teams use the inside linebacker as a scrape-off linebacker, on the inside eye of the offensive guard approximately two yards deep, with his feet parallel. The keys vary, but generally the scrape-off linebacker will key the ball. When the ball is snapped, if the flow is his way on a running, play, he is responsible for the area vacated

by the slanting tackle and he will scrape by the tackle.

The scrape-off linebacker is so named because the defensive tackle in front of him hits or blocks the offensive guard.

Then the scrape-off linebacker goes to the ball off the tackle's back. It is important to make sure that the scrape-off linebacker squares off and does not loop to his responsibility.

If the play is going wider than the scrape-off line-backer's area of responsibility, and he can go through to make tackle, he does. If the area is too congested, and he cannot get through, he should then shuffle down the line, keeping leverage on the ball. He should head for the spot where the back will be when he cuts up field.

Whenever the ball stays behind the center the scrapeoff linebacker should take a step to his outside with his
outside foot, keeping the inside foot in place. This
prevents a too rapid committment on counter plays. If the
flow is away from the scrape-off linebacker, he goes down
the line cautiously, keeping even with the ball. He should
keep his shoulders parallel to the line and gain depth as
the play gets wider.

If the flow is his way and play is a drop-back pass, the scrape-off linebacker should start the same step to his hook area. This is an area seven to ten yards deep in the defensive backfield in line with the offensive tackle. If the quarterback pulls up, he pulls up and gets to a depth

seven to ten yards behind the line. He should never allow a receiver to cross in front of him.

The stance for the outside linebacker is basically the same as for the inside linebacker. The only difference is the stagger of the feet with his lining up with the outside foot up head on the offensive end. He should take all the ball he can get which means lining up close to the ball. On the snap, he jab steps into the end using a flipper, watching the offensive tackle to the inside. If the flow is a run in his direction he is primarily responsible for the off-tackle hole. If the end does not block down on the outside linebacker, then he looks for the offensive tackle's block. If the tackle blocks down, the linebacker sets for a trap or a block by the near back. If the end turns out on the defensive end, then the linebacker should be ready for a turn out block by the offensive tackle. important point the outside linebacker must remember is meet pressure with pressure. For example if the tackle tries to take him in, he goes out; or if the tackle tries to take him out, he goes in.

When the flow goes away from the linebacker he should drop back into the intermediate zone if a zone defense is being used. The intermediate zone is an area of about 40 degrees on an angle behind the defensive end.

All linebackers must look intently at the offensive because it indicates to the linebackers the direction and

type of play. As the linebacker reacts to the ball, he will be blocked by some member of the offensive team. In protecting himself, he should use either the hand shiver (using the palm on the offensive man) or the forearm shiver charge (striking the offensive man with the forearm) in a violent manner. This charge can never be so clean or accurate as that used by linemen because the linebacker will, almost always, be moving before he is contacted by the offensive player. However in the area of the field where contact is made, as the linebacker is blocked, he must make every effort to assume the hitting position. He must lower his center of gravity, flex his knees, and hit his opponent with the forearm or hand shiver. The blow should be delivered from underneath his opponent and should raise him up and drive him back and away from the linebacker's body so that he is free to continue his movement to the ball.

According to Huff1:

"Wherever the ball goes, inside or out, on the ground or in the air, the linebacker is expected to make a play that will stop, or at least cut off, the offensive team's forward progress. His responsibilities are greater than those of any other defensive player."

Fundamentals For The Linemen

Defensive line play is largely tackling, but in order

lop. cit.

to tackle one must meet the ball carrier and when opposed by blockers this is sometimes difficult.

Often a player is more effective in a maneuver he has developed himself than he is with the standard techniques that are taught by the coach. It should be remembered that no maneuver will work frequently if it is anticipated by the opponent.

A defensive lineman is confronted with many offensive formations. Sometimes a lineman is immediately attacked by two opponents, shoulder to shoulder, and if the play comes over his territory contact is usually made rapidly. He therefore must withstand a hard initial thrust and must execute the appropriate maneuver as rapidly as possible. To compensate for this thrust, he is not expected to cover so much territory as he would if only one man on the line of scrimmage were to attack him.

Sometimes a lineman is attacked initially by only one offensive player. However there may be two to four opponents attempting to block him during the course of a play, although seldom do they contact him at the same time. This makes it possible to do some maneuvering, if necessary, before he meets the play.

The defensive action is governed by four principles: One, get across the line of scrimmage. Two, protect the territory immediately in front. If forced to retreat, retreat over the same ground advanced. Three go for the ball only after getting across the line of scrimmage and protecting the assigned area. Four, want to tackle. If a man cannot tackle, he is weak defensively without regard for what else he may be able to do.

For the defensive lineman to carry out all his duties, he must have a good, strong, balanced stance that enables him to move forward or in slanting directions to deliver a quick powerful blow. The stance on defense is similar to the one used on offense. The main difference is that the weight is more forward, since he does not have to move laterally to the line of scrimmage.

The feet of the lineman are about shoulder width, with one foot slightly back in a staggered position. One or two hands can be on the ground. The weight is forward on the hands. When both hands are touching the ground the position is called the four-point stance. This is optional for defensive linemen. The defensive lineman keeps the ball in his split vision, which means he can see the ball without really looking at it, so that he can move the moment it is snapped. Then he must move to make the tackle.

## CHAPTER III

### SELECTING THE DEFENSE

The pattern of defense that is used will depend on the strength and on the offensive pattern of the opponent. If a team is superior in all aspects to the opposition, almost any standard defense will probably be suitable. If a team is equal in capabilities to its opponent, a carefully selected pattern of defensive play, geared to accommodate the opponent's strength, is appropriate. If a team is inferior to its opponent, it is necessary to use specially selected defensive patterns. An unexpected or unusual defense frequently catches an opponent unprepared, and will tend to demoralize it and reduce the effectiveness of the offense. A combination of strategic defenses, plus a "super-charged" team determination causes most of the upsets in football.

Offensive Patterns Of The Opponents

To select the proper defense, it is important to know the strong points of the opponent's attack. Such information is usually gathered through scouting reports. By knowing the opponent's strengthes, the defense can be arranged so as to concentrate at the opponents strong point. This concentration should be employed only when a

weakness is not left open for the exploitation of an alert offensive team.

According to Faurot, Bell and Bierman, 1 the type of defensive formation to be adopted should be governed somewhat by experience and ability of the players, the offense that is to be met most frequently, and the prevailing weather conditions.

To concentrate at one or two points will inevitably weaken a defense at other points. The theory behind this maneuver, however, is to stifle the opponent's best plays. The effect, again, is to demoralize the opposition. Nothing seems to disturb the average team more than to have its favorite plays stopped. Because of the weakened defense at other points, it is desirable to have some variations of this defense.

A defensive player should be exposed to every conceivable block that he may eventually experience. This
is done until each individual player has a good appreciation of the various offensive blocking techniques,
together with an understanding of proper defensive counteractions.

MONAD HARBY

Football. The United States Naval Institute, 1950, P. 169.

#### CHAPTER IV

#### THE FOUR MAN DEFENSIVE LINE

Strength Of The Four Man Line

The four-man line has great defensive potential, once the line of scrimmage is analyzed. In addition, the four-man line has exceptional strength for pass defense. When the linebackers enter the line a six or eight man line develops.

In the four-man defensive line the ends function in these ways:

- 1. They key the halfback on their sides. If there is no halfback on their sides, they key the fullback. They must not get blocked in.
- 2. They must rush hard from outside in if play is toward the ends. If play is towards them, they must move forward across the line and check for reverses and bootlegs.
- 3. The ends must not leave their positions too soon. Once the play is analyzed they drop back in a straight line and play the ball.

The tackles line up one foot from the ball and on the outside ear of the offensive guard at an angle facing in.

They must contain the ball from tackle to tackle.

- 1. If guards pull they must chase them.
- 2. The right tackle is responsible for the draw man on all drop offs, and must avoid being trapped.

The inside linebackers will play the quarterback or the fullback depending on the opponents attack.

- 1. If the quarterback or fullback moves left, the left inside linebacker will move down the line ready to fill the line where the fullback hits.
- 2. The right inside linebacker will start left, stop behind the center to check for plays that might move the other way or for traps. If none develop, the right inside linebacker will deepen into the left hook zone. If a drop back pass is attempted he must drop back to the hook area.

The outside linebackers will line up in an up position, head up on the offensive end.

- 1. They must watch the halfback on their side if play comes toward them and rush the line hard. If the play moves away from them, they are expected to hit the end on the pads and drop back into the intermediate area.
- 2. If a dropoff pass develops, they should drop to the flat area as in a seven-man coverage.
- 3. If an outside linebacker crosses the line with little opposition, he should stop and check immediately to the inside and look for pulling guards.
- 4. The outside linebackers must stay low and hit the pulling guards.

Pass Defense Of The Four Man Line

The halfbacks must look through the end to the halfback on their side.

- 1. If the offensive halfback comes to their side, the defensive halfbacks are responsible for the flat area and end runs.
- 2. The halfbacks must come up from the outside and move in. If the halfback on their side leaves, they will pick up the end on their side on a man-for-man basis.
- 3. On all dropoff passes the halfbacks will drop off and cover the outside one third of the defensive backfield.

The safety man will cover over and deep to the side of the flow of the ball.

- 1. On all dropoff passes he will cover the middle onethird.
- 2. If a run develops he will cover from the inside out.

#### CHAPTER V

### THE FIVE MAN DEFENSIVE LINE

Strength Of The Five Man Line

The five man or "fifty four" defense has few weaknesses and it is effective against the "T" formation.

The defensive ends line up almost in front of the offensive end.

- 1. As the ball is snapped, the ends charge straight into the offensive end, making sure that the end does not block them in.
- 2. They must play the end. If the end blocks to the inside, they do not penetrate, but move along the line of scrimmage with him, closing the end tackle gap to their inside. If the end attempts to block them out, they must fight pressure and stay in place.
- 3. They should not be faked to the inside where the end will be able to reverse body block and take them in. If the end attempts to take them in by a hook block, they give ground quickly along the line of scrimmage to the outside. The end must avoid being blocked by the offensive end.

The tackles line up directly opposite the offensive tackle.

- 1. As the ball is snapped they charge straight into the tackle, making sure that the tackle does not block them in. If the tackle blocks to the inside they do not penetrate, but move along the line of scrimmage with him closing the gap to the inside.
- 2. If the tackle attempts to block them out, they must fight pressure; holding their ground as long as possible.

3. They should not be faked to the inside where the tackles will be able to reverse body block them and take them in. If the tackle attempts to take them in by a hook block, they give ground quickly along the line of scrimmage to the outside. The offensive tackles must never block them in.

Some of these assignments are the same as for the ends. If a defensive tackle is able to get away from the offensive end and tackle, they should move quickly on the proper angle of pursuit in an attempt to get in front of the ball at the earliest possible moment.

The middle guard should line up, head on the offensive center about two feet from the line of scrimmage and his play should be governed by these principles.

- 1. He must vary the strength of his charge from play to play. Occasionally, he will charge hard into the center and attempt to knock him back. Most of the time, however, he will charge with just enough force to control the offensive center, but he must control both sides of the center, maintaining his ability to move to either side.
- 2. If he charges hard, he can be cut to one side more easily by the center. If he takes a soft, controlled charge, it will be difficult for the center to take him either way. But if he charges too softly, the center will be able to knock him back.

Since the middle guard must control both sides of one offensive man, he has the most difficult defensive assignment. His task is most difficult against an equally capable opponent. All the other linemen need protect only one side to have the defense hold up adequately but he must protect two sides.

# Pass Defense Of The Five Man Line

The inside linebackers line up a yard and a half off the line of scrimmage on the outside shoulder of the offensive guard, and they react to and key the movement of the guard.

- 1. If the guard drives out on them, they charge straight into the guard and contact him on his outside shoulder. They should not let the guard block them in. If the guard blocks aggressively to his left or to his right, they shoot the gap.
- 2. As they cross the line of scrimmage, they stay as close as possible to the power block made by the guard. By so doing they will be hard to trap.
- 3. If the guard pulls in either direction, they move with the guard, find the ball, and pursue on the proper angle. If the guard straightens up and drops back to make a pass protection block, they move quickly to the hook zone and play the ball.

The corner linebackers line up three yards behind the line of scrimmage and four to five yards outside the offensive end.

- 1. If the ball starts towards them, they must give ground laterally to the outside with the ball as their key.
- 2. If the lineman crosses the line of scrimmage to come downfield, they move up immediately and force the play while maintaining outside position on the ball.
- 3. They should meet the blocker about two yards behind the line of scrimmage. From this position they will be able to give ground back and to the outside to keep the ball from being moved around them.
- 4. They should always avoid coming up so fast that they overrun the ball; that is, getting deeper than the ball itself. If they overrun, they will be blocked out easily, and the ball carrier will move on the same course without reduction in speed. The ball

- carrier will go inside them, and yet be outside the rest of the team exactly as he would if the line-backers were too shallow and were blocked in.
- 5. They can determine if the play is a run, if a lineman goes downfield. If the ball goes away from
  them, they drop straight back quickly and key to
  see whether they should continue straight back as a
  pass defender or move across the field as they would
  do in the case of a running play. If the ball moves
  back away from the line of scrimmage, they drop
  back and out, playing pass defense until they are
  positive the play is a run.

The defensive halfbacks should line up seven to eight yards deep on the inside shoulder of the offensive end. As the ball is snapped, they move with it and react to their key, the offensive guard.

- 1. If the guard goes downfield, they come up quickly to support for a running play. If the guard is not downfield, they continue to move with the ball. The farther the ball moves laterally, the farther they should move in that direction, at the same time giving ground back.
- 2. They continue to move back playing pass defense until they are positive it is a run.

According to Leahyl "the five man line has been the basic formation of our defensive system ever since we started coaching at Boston College in 1939. The main reason we like to start off with a five-man line is that it presents less chance of error than does any other defensive plan."

Leahy, Frank., Defensive Football. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1951, P. 23.

### CHAPTER VI

## THE SIX MAN DEFENSIVE LINE

# Strength Of The Six Man Line

In the last ten years the cycle of offense has changed, with the "I" formation, double wing and all types of motion. Hence, it is still necessary to have a plan for a six man defensive line so that offensive strength can be met with defensive strength.

The six two defense is a reading defense and is the most difficult type of defense to play. It requires much more time to teach because the major portion of the responsibility is based on the defense's recognition of the offensive play. It is important in this defense that everyone play his responsibility first, and then react. It also follows that pursuit is one of the advantages in this type of defense, but the angle of pursuit varies greatly depending on the type of play. The pursuit angle of the team is a major coaching responsibility. Keeping a perimeter around the ball is a necessity at all times.

In the six two defense the guards are lined up on the nose of the offensive guards about two feet from the ball. They should be in a four point stance with the feet on line and about shoulder width apart. It is important that they

maintain a neutral stance with legs in a coiled position to provide explosive power. The guards must key the offensive tackle, guard and center.

- 1. The guards play a reaction-type defense. When either the offensive center or tackle blocks toward them, the defensive guards should take a short lateral step toward the potential blocker.
- 2. The defensive guard slides or spins across the head of his offensive opponent; he never takes the "easy way" around the blockers.
- 3. When he senses a trap, he holds his position, hits low and meets the trapper by exploding into him, driving him down the line. Since the guard is lined up two feet off the ball, he cannot afford to give any more ground.

The tackles line up in a three-point stance, and like the guards, stay low and balanced. The outside foot of the tackle should be slightly in front of the inside foot and the legs should be coiled. The width of his base is slightly wider than his shoulders. He must line up approximately 18 inches off the ball with his inside eye on the outside eye of the offensive end. He must key the offensive tackle.

- 1. If the offensive end is blocking him, the defensive tackle feels him and fights pressure laterally in or out against the block of the end. If the end has released, the defensive tackle reacts to the key given him by the offensive tackle's block.
- 2. If neither the offensive end nor tackle blocks on him, the defensive tackle must set for a trap by a back or a pulling interior lineman.
- 3. The defensive tackle must maintain a constant split of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  yards from his defensive guard as long as the offensive halfback on his side is in his normal position, regardless of the split of the offensive

lineman. When the offensive halfback is not in his normal position, the defensive tackle moves to a nose up position on the offensive end.

4. On plays away from him, he becomes the chase man.
He is responsible for deep reverses and bootlegs.
On straight drop back passes, the tackles have the added responsibility of containing the passer.

In this defense the play of the end is very important since he acts as both a back and lineman.

The defensive end lines up in a crouched position with his outside foot back, shoulder parallel to the line of scrimmage and weight forward on the balls of his feet. He should take as much of the ball as he can and get across the line of scrimmage as quickly as possible.

The end lines up on the line of scrimmage about two or two and one half yards from his defensive tackle. He must key the halfback on his side. If there is no halfback, he must key the offensive fullback.

Rules For The Backers And Deep Men

The linebackers should have a comfortable stance and be physically relaxed, but alert. Their feet should be spread the width of the shoulders, with the outside foot slightly back and the weight evenly distributed. The knees should be slightly bent, the head up, and the eyes looking ahead with split vision.

The linebackers line up directly on the nose of the offensive tackle and about three yards from the line of scrimmage. Their depths will vary with the down and distance

to the goal.

- 1. They will key through the offensive tackles into the backfield. They should be aware of the tackle's block and the backfield action.
- 2. Linebackers are the backbone of the internal defense. Against a run, if the offensive tackle releases directly at the linebacker, the linebacker steps up to meet him vigorously and squarely. On plays directed to their outside, they should hit from the inside out, and on plays to their inside, they should hit from the outside. When the play is directed away from them, they should keep an inside out position on the ball at all times and be a little slower in leaving their position to eliminate the cutback.
- 3. When the linebacker recognizes a straight drop back pass, he retreats over his outside shoulder to his hook zone and pulls up just as the quarterback starts his throw; he then breaks in the direction of the throw.
- 4. On the play action pass he is responsible for his hook zone first, then the flat. In this defense the linebackers will have a difficult job in covering the flats unless they are worked with every night.

In the secondary, a zone, a man for man pass defense, or a semi-zone pass defense can be used. The success of any pass defense will ultimately rest upon the maturity and experience of the players.

Most zone defenses base their claim for merit on the theory that they can stop the long touchdown pass. It is a cardinal rule of any pass defense that no receiver should get behind a defender. Another advantage of the zone defense is its simplicity to learn. Halfbacks and safetys have an area to cover rather than any one individual. They must play the ball from the time it leaves the passer's

hand.

There are several drawbacks to any zone defense which may be overcome to a great extent by an experienced, well-coached secondary. The biggest disadvantage to the zone is the fact that short passes can be completed in the seam between the linebackers and the deep secondary, but, of course, the zone is prepared to concede yardage between the thirty-yard lines, since its main objective is to prevent the easy touchdown. The philosophy of the zone defense is that a penalty, fumble, missed assignment or an interception will stall the attack before any real damage can be done.

- 1. The halfbacks should watch linemen for tip offs. Ends blocking on the line of scrimmage are hardly likely to come downfield for pass plays. Linemen must give the passer protection so tip offs can still be flashed by their actions.
- 2. The safety man in zone plays about eight or nine yards deep and has the biggest responsibility on the defensive team. He is the last resort; to him falls the job of stopping the touchdown play. He must be a sure tackler and have above average speed.
- 3. In any pass defense the secondary must go for the ball when it leaves the passer's hand. Once this practice is instilled into the secondary, it will have many interceptions.

In the man-for-man pass defense, the best pass defenders can be assigned to cover any forward receivers.

- 1. Good defenders can be assigned to cover good receivers.
- 2. It is believed that the running pass or the play action pass is best defensed by a man-for-man

style of pass defense, since the defender always plays his eligible receiver whenever he penetrates the secondary.

In the man-for-man defense, as in zone, there are certain weaknesses. Most notable is the inclination of halfbacks to concentrate upon their possible receiver to the exclusion of the rest of the game. They keep their eyes on the receiver and lose sight of the ball, being content to tackle him when he catches the pass. In cases such as this, there are very few interceptions.

Another disadvantage is that in watching the receiver, the deep secondary, especially, cannot come up as fast on the running play because they do not see it until it has developed, but this fault can be overcome through drills that teach the defense to watch their men and the field of play by developing their peripheral vision.

The deep secondary should keep track of their men as well as the passer. This is not difficult to learn. The same rules of play govern the man-for-man defenders as in the zone. They anticipate the pass direction and watch for tip offs by the passer and lineman, then play the ball, but always within three yards of their man.

The best aspects of the zone and man-for-man defenses are used in the semi-zone pass defense. The main advantage to this defense comes from the interchanging of responsibility between the safety man and strong side halfback. Both of these men play a zone until a receiver invades the area,

which is the signal to pick him up and play him man for man. Normally, the safety would look for the strong side end to come down deep or enter his area. In each case he assumes responsibility for defensing him, but to confuse and make it harder to cover the receivers, pass patterns will call for crisscrossing between the end and flanker. Rather then yell "switch", which frequently is not heard, the halfback and safety man remain in their zones until the crisscross is completed or diagnosed and then pick up the invading receiver.

The halfbacks watch both the end and the flanker, but with more attention on the latter. As the play develops, they quickly determine as he drops back whether the end is on their inside and coming on a straight line. Any criss-cross will start five to ten yards downfield and far enough up front for the halfback to see it developing. With the end on his inside and coming on a straight line or heading for the safety man's area, they leave him to be picked up by the safety man, and their attention is then concentrated on the flanker. Under such conditions they play the flanker whether he invades their area, or by angling, crosses into the middle of the play area.

The weak side halfback plays the weak side end man for man. The linebackers take the second and third man out of the backfield man for man.

#### CHAPTER VIII

#### GOAL LINE DEFENSES

Adjustments For The Eight Three

Many coaches have given up on the eight three defense or the gap eight defense. It has many disadvantages including the following:

- 1. It gives the offensive lineman the angle.
- 2. It is more susceptible to trapping and it provides a poor pursuit position.
- 3. It is more susceptible to blocking down on sweep plays and it helps the offensive line with their pivot blocking for pass protection.
- 4. It can't hold up two linemen if the offensive line widens out.
- 5. It helps the offensive linemen with their isolation blocking and their roll out blocking and it increases the chances for that long gainer.

The hardest adjustment in this eight three is when the offensive end splits out five and runs an in pattern, then a back delays and goes into the flat. This defense asks the defensive halfback to cover the impossible.

An end could drop off and cover the inside man, but then the defense is in poor shape for the play action pass.

According to Dodd1:

"Certainly a team must have a good goal line defense.

lop. cit.

The psychology used in coaching this defense in this zone is most important. The coach must sell his team that when they hit the ten-yard line the defense has the advantage because they have cut down the territory to defend on passes and runs and eleven men are in position to tackle on the line of scrimmage without worrying about eligible receivers getting behind them."

## Adjustments For The Six Five

The 6-5 defense is equally sound against both the pass and the run. With one good middle linebacker and four good defensive halfbacks who play almost like linebackers, this defense provides flexibility in adjusting to motion and other various formations or shifts.

The 6-5, like any other goal line defense, must be accepted by the players or it won't work. The defensive unit must be confident and determined not to yield a point.

Whenever the other team is approaching the goal line, a positive mental attitude becomes more essential than at any other time. The idea that no one can score becomes even more important than the particular defense.

The coach must sell the men on the 6-5, then try to sell each individual on doing everything in his power to keep the opponent from scoring.

The emphasis for the front six must be penetration and hence they must make a low charge. To get penetration the goal line stance must be lower than normal. After penetrating, the front six must come up on their hands and knees with their heads up and go for the ball.

The middle linebacker is usually the best football player on defense.

- 1. He must key the quarterback and the ball.
- 2. He is responsible for the guard and center gaps and the guard and tackle gaps.
- 3. He must attack the blocker or ballcarrier up in the hole.
- 4. He must hit the ball carrier high and drive him back.

Guards in the 6-5 defense:

- 1. Must penetrate and draw the blocks of both offensive guards and also keep the opposing center off the middle linebacker.
- 2. Must fire low and hard.

Tackles must line up on the outside eye of the offensive tackle, slightly pointing in.

- 1. They must penetrate through the offensive tackle.
- 2. The tackle must be knocked into the hole.

Ends line up in a three-point stance, on the outside shoulder of the offensive end, slightly pointing in.

- 1. They must contain the backfield.
- 2. They must penetrate or they will be a poor goal line defense.

The inside halfbacks stack behind the defensive end's inside leg.

The outside halfbacks play three yards outside the defensive end, taking either an inside or outside alignment on the receiver. If the receiver has room for an outside cut, the halfback should line up slightly outside.

Ends must contain and a hard rush is a must. The middle linebacker and defensive halfbacks are responsible for the fifths on a dropback or flow pass.

With a maximum of twenty yards to defend in depth, a team should not be concerned with "getting beat deep", therefore, the defensive backs must choke down the alignment on wide receivers and cover every receiver in the area as close as possible.

On the flow pass, the fifths to the side of the flow close down while the fifths to the back side become larger. The defenders must be near all receivers in their area.

The 6-5 defense is the best goal line defense and so many hours must be spent preparing the men to play this defense. The men must be made to believe that when the opponents have the ball inside the ten yard line, they will not score.

#### CHAPTER VIII

#### DEFENSIVE KICKING GAME

The defensive kicking game as it is played today is one of the most important phases of football. Many football games have been won by the team that has the better kicking game. Since the defensive kicking game is a vital part of the game plans, extensive practice time must be devoted to it. In most football games the defensive kick will be used as much as any other particular play.

The kicking game should start during the specialty period, possibly thirty minutes before practice. Kickers, passers and centers should be handled together during this period. During their working together, the moves of the centers and kickers should be under continual observation by a coach.

- 1. The coach makes certain that the kicker takes his proper depth.
- 2. The coach checks the center's snap and the kicker's actions in kicking the ball.

A stop watch should be used to time the centers. They should be trained to get the ball to the kicker in six-tenths of a second. Then the kicker should be timed. The time elapsing between the arrival of the ball in the kicker's hands until it leaves his foot should not be more than one and one fifth seconds. Then the whole operation should be

timed from the time the center moves the ball until it leaves the kicker's foot. If the kick is away in less than two seconds with the kicker at a thirteen yard depth, a kick will seldom be blocked.

During this specialty period the quick kick, which is a great weapon in defensive football, should be practiced as should the kick off and onside kick. During regularly scheduled practice there should be work on the kicking game for about ten minutes five times a week.

The kick-off is an important part of the defensive kicking game. Obviously at crucial periods of the game namely at the beginning of both halves and after scoring. An opponent scoring on the kick-off return tends to be demoralizing.

Preparations For The Coming Game

In the preparations for a game a team usually finds that the opponents have one or two favorite ball carriers. These are usually fast backs who can score if they get the ball. A team should try to kick the ball away from these good men.

Coverage on the kick off is similar for most teams.

The men line up five yards from the ball or ten yards. The defensive quarterback is about a yard behind the ball. All the men watch the quarterback, and they must start together.

There are two ball chasers and one safety and the ends

must contain.

The spread punt formation has one main advantage.

Bryant states the following:

"The main advantage of using spread punt formation is that the defensive team has a difficult time holding up your coverage. A team can cover its punt wider. If a team can spread its men across the field as they are covering a kick, it is very hard for the receiving team to return the ball for sizeable gain."

In the spread punt formation, the splits are very important. With a spread punt formation, the men may split five or six yards, which may be too great. The guards should split about one and one half yards from the center and the tackles split about one and one half to two yards from the guards. The ends are wide enough to be in a position to block a man in the inside gap if the situation presents itself. This is usually a three or four yard split. The two "close up" backs are one half yard deep in the middle of the gap between the center and guards. The "protector" back is five yards deep on the right directly behind the right "close up" back for a right footed kicker. For a left footed kicker the "protector" will line up behind the left "close up" back. The kicker is thirteen yards deep directly behind the center.

General blocking rules for the spread punt formation

Bryant, "Bear" W. Paul., Building A Championship Football Team. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., P. 117.

- 1. The center must make the snap to the kicker and throw up his head and cover immediately.
- 2. The guards block the first men to their outside, if no one is lined up to their outside cover immediately.
- 3. The tackles block to their inside when there are two men or more between them and the guard. If there are fewer than two men between them and a guard, they block to the outside and cover the kick.
- 4. The ends, if there are two men between the tackle and the guard or between the end and the tackle, block to the inside; otherwise, they hit to the outside and cover the kick immediately.
- 5. The "close up" backs block anyone coming over their territory. If no one comes through there, they delay slightly and cover the kick.
- 6. The protector looks up and down the line and blocks the most dangerous man to the kicker.

The coverage is simple but it takes work and concentration on the part of the men to learn. The ends usually will be the first men down and they must contain. The tackles, guards and center cover their positions keeping about four yards apart until they start converging on the ball carrier. It is important that they do not trail one another when they are covering the kick. One blocker could eliminate four if they were trailing each other. The first interior linemen downfield can throw himself recklessly at the ball carrier, trying to cause a fumble. The other linemen must come under control about three yards from the ball. After coming under control the linemen should be in a good fundamental football position. The

two "close up" backs consider themselves linebackers, getting to a position between the guards and tackles and get ready to play linebacker. The right "close up" back covers to the right and the left to the left. They should never overrun the line coverage. The kicker and the "protector" back act as outside linebackers. Their assignment is to get outside any wall set up by the returning team. When they are outside this wall they are in a position to tackle the runner if he can get behind the wall on a punt return. The kicker covers to the left and the "protector" back covers to the right.

The kickers must put the ball high in the air; preferably a high forty yard kick. If the ball stays in the air for four seconds coverage can be satisfactory. While the offensive team works on the kicking game, the defensive team may work on the punt return. Returning the punt is a great defensive measure. It is difficult to teach the punt receiver, after catching the ball, to take three or four strides straight ahead so the offensive ends will draw in, and a wall can be set for a long return.

## Demanding Perfection

In all aspects of defensive football the coach should demand perfection and show enthusiasm. His relationship to his players should be friendly but not familiar. However, he should be aware of the limitation of his

personnel and realize that both offenses and defenses are designed to overcome the other. Thus, any demands for perfection will not degenerate into the unreasonable.

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