



ULTIMATE 4-3 DEFENSE PLAYBOOK

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Introduction

There are a lot of tough decisions you have to make as a head football coach, but there's one that should be pretty easy – choosing your defensive scheme. So what are your choices?

The 4-3 defense is a football staple, a classic that will likely be around as long as football is. While there are different defensive schemes, ultimately, most teams will end up making a decision between two – the 4-3 and the 3-4. These numbers are in reference to the position and alignment of the front seven players on the defense. The first number is the number of defensive linemen, the second the number of linebackers. And while there is no true 'better' scheme, depending on your personal football philosophy as well as the players available to you, you may find the 4-3 is the right defense for you.

Generally, the 4-3 is the more conservative of the two. You have four down linemen, two of which are on the field to put pressure on the quarterback. This means you can rely on your base defense, blitzing rarely and allowing your linebackers to focus on playing the run or coverage, and allowing your defensive ends to get after the quarterback.

Predilection for conservative or aggressive playcalling aside however, if you're truly starting from scratch, then you should really first be looking at your personnel. If you're looking to build a 4-3, the strongest foundations are a pair of talented ends who can both rush the passer and play the run effectively, as well a Mike linebacker with the size, speed and strength to make plays all over the field.

We'll break down everything about what makes the 4-3 one of the most popular defensive schemes in football today, with everything from positional responsibilities, to coverage schemes and blitz packages. I

Last note before we get started... if you'd like to see all of these coverages and blitzes explained with step by step video instructions, coaching tips, and key defensive drills for 4-3 teams you can upgrade your package by visiting the page below:

<http://www.football-tutorials.com/p/upgrade43>

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Legend



Hook zone: A zone located in the middle of the field about 8-12 yards off the line of scrimmage.



Deep zone: A player assigned the deep zone will step back to about 18-20 yards off the line of scrimmage, playing 'top down' defense, meaning that he won't allow any player to get deeper than him on the field.



Flat zone: The flat starts at the line of scrimmage and goes about 8 yards deep, but is located on the outside of the field, from the numbers to the sideline.



Curl to Flat zone: A curl to flat assignment means the defender is responsible for the area covering the numbers to the sideline and the line of scrimmage up to about 10-12 yards deep. Their first responsibility is to defend against the curl, after which they will move up to defend the flat.



Blitz: The player will blitz, attacking the quarterback through the illustrated gap.



Man Coverage Assignment: Indicates a player the defender is responsible for covering man to man. Depending on the play, the defender may need to force said man to the inside or outside.

4-3 Basics

Positional Responsibilities and Alignment

While each position's responsibilities and alignment are subject to change based on the playcall, there are certain base responsibilities that apply to each position, unless otherwise noted. The alignment is also subject to change based on the variety of offensive formations you may see. Here however, we will look at the alignment when facing a typical split back offense. It should also be noted that a player's position on the field – left or right – is made from the point of view of the defense. For example, the left defensive end lines up in front of the right offensive tackle.

Defensive Line

The '4' of the 4-3 represents your defensive linemen, often referred to as the front four. Each player has different strengths and weaknesses, as well as differing gap responsibilities in the run game.

Left End (LE): The left end lines up outside of the right tackle and is responsible for controlling the 'D' gap in the run game, and has trail responsibilities when the ball is run away from him. He is generally the stronger, better run defender of the two ends, as he'll often have to deal with the tight end chipping in as an extra blocker next to the right tackle. That said, he does need to be able to rush the passer off the edge with some consistency as well.

Defensive Tackle (DT): This is the three technique tackle, lining up on the outside shoulder of the strong side guard. Of the two tackles, he will be the one better suited to rushing the passer and is generally quicker and lighter. He will shoot the 'B' gap, looking to penetrate in the backfield at the snap of the ball regardless of the playcall.

Nose Tackle (NT): The nose tackle is the biggest, strongest member of the defensive line. He will line up on the weak side shoulder of the center, and his job is to control the 'A' gap and eat up a double team so as to keep his fellow linemen in one on one situations and the linebackers behind him free and unblocked.

Right End (RE): The right end is the most athletic player on our defensive line and our pass rushing specialist. He'll lineup on the outside shoulder of the left tackle, although in obvious passing situations, he can step even further out to allow a better angle from which to rush the passer. He is responsible for the 'C' gap as well as trailing the play from the backside in the run game.

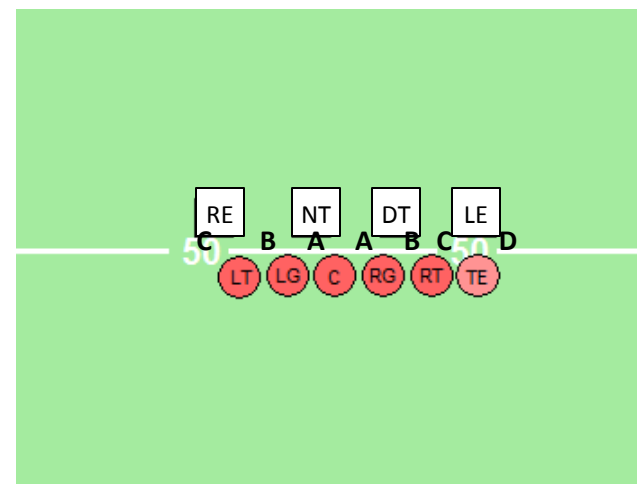


Figure 1a: Defensive Line Alignment

4-3 Basics

Positional Responsibilities and Alignment - Continued

Linebackers

The '3' of the 4-3 represents your linebackers. These players need to be able to quickly diagnose plays and attack the football in the running game, while also possessing the speed and agility to drop into coverage on passing downs.

Strong Side Linebacker (Sam, S): The Sam linebacker will line up in front of the right tackle, about four to five yards off the line of scrimmage, right in front of the strong side 'C' gap. Of the two outside linebackers, the Sam linebacker is generally the stronger and heavier of the two. Since he will be lining up on the same side of the field as the tight end, the Sam linebacker needs to be tough against the run, able to take on lead blockers without giving up ground. He will also need to be strong in coverage, as he will be the one that ends up with the assignment of covering the tight end in a host of different coverage schemes.

Middle Linebacker (Mike, M): The Mike linebacker is often referred to as the quarterback of the defense. This is because it is he who is in charge of calling out most of the defensive signals and making sure that the defense is aligned properly.

He also needs the same savvy a quarterback possesses, with the ability to identify what the opposition is doing and react accordingly; whether that's dropping into deep coverage, stepping up to lay the boom on a short pass, or making plays in the run game in the backfield as well as from sideline to sideline. He'll start in the middle of the field, about four to five yards off the line of scrimmage and in between the nose tackle and the three technique tackle, in line with the strong side 'A' gap.

Weak Side Linebacker (Will, W): The Will linebacker is the lightest, most explosive athlete of the three linebackers, and he'll line up in between his right end and the nose tackle, playing the weak side 'B' gap. With teams most often running to the strong side, the Sam and Mike linebackers will be taking on the primary blockers, while the Will linebacker gets to fly through traffic to make a play on the ball carrier.

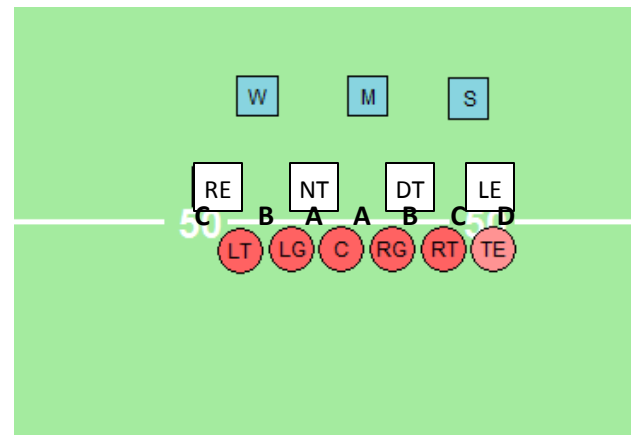


Figure 1b: Linebacker Alignment

4-3 Basics

Positional Responsibilities and Alignment - Continued

Secondary

The remaining four members of the defense make up your secondary. What we ask our secondary to do has a lot to do with alignment and playcall.

Cornerbacks (CB): Your corners will line up across from their respective matchups, positioning themselves with proper leverage depending on the alignment of the secondary.

In a Cover 2 alignment, the corners will line up on the inside shoulder of the receiver, forcing him out to the sideline and preventing him from running up the seam. These techniques are called playing with an outside or inside shade, respectively.

In a Cover 1 alignment, the corners will line up on the outside shoulder of the receiver, preventing him from beating them out to the sideline where the defense is more vulnerable.

Regardless, whether the defense is in a Cover 1 or Cover 2 alignment, or playing man or zone - your corners are going to be among the fastest, most fluid athletes on the field.

However beyond that, the type of player you use at corner is going to depend greatly on your available personnel and preferred scheme. If you want to play man coverage, you're going to need athletic corners who can track a receiver one on one, reading his eyes and making a play on the ball with good timing.

If you want to play more zone coverage you're going to need corners who have the ability to read the quarterbacks eyes and jump routes, looking to get a hand on the ball or deliver a hit on the receiver right as they go to make the catch. If you want your corners to play press, you're going to want bigger, stronger corners, whether they're dropping into man or zone after bumping the receivers at the line.

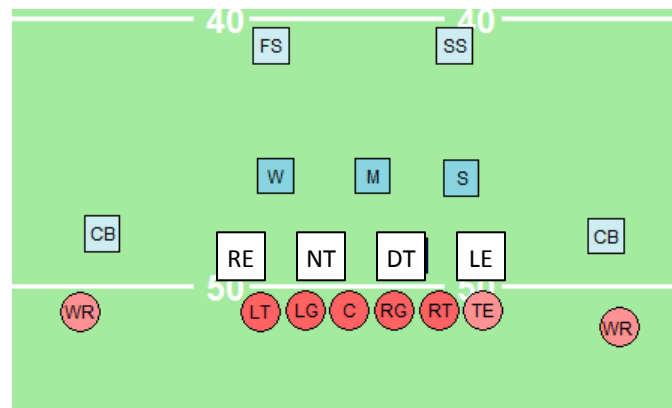


Figure 1c: Secondary Alignment (Cover 2)

4-3 Basics

Positional Responsibilities and Alignment - Continued

Secondary – Continued

Free Safety (FS): The free safety is your center fielder, playing ten to fifteen yards off the line of scrimmage, either smack in the middle or slightly off to one side, depending on whether it's a Cover 1 or Cover 2 alignment. He needs to be instinctual and athletic, able to quickly diagnose a play and disrupt it – while still staying disciplined.

He needs to be able to help out in the run game – without overcommitting and leaving the defense vulnerable to playaction. This is especially true when the defense is playing a Cover 1 alignment, as the strong safety is acting essentially as a fourth linebacker in this situation, leaving the free safety as the sole, last line of defense.

Strong Safety (SS): A classic strong safety is much like a cross between a free safety and a Will linebacker – and just where they are on that spectrum will depend greatly on your scheme. They need the ability to come up into the box to stuff the run, which is just what most Cover 1 teams will ask them to do.

But they also have the ability to drop into coverage, whether that involves playing flat or deep zones or playing man coverage on a tight end. That said, some schemes essentially play two free safeties, and some schemes essentially have the strong safety as their fourth linebacker. It all depends on your personal preference as well as the talent pool available to you.

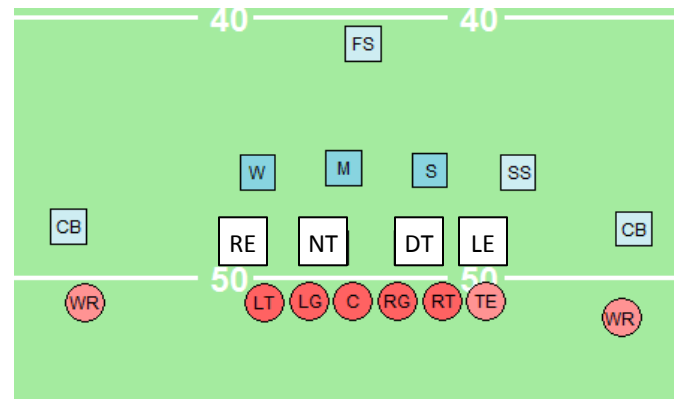


Figure 1d: Secondary Alignment (cover 1)

Base 4-3 – Man Coverages

The first three plays we're going to look at out of our base 4-3 defense are man to man defenses. This type of playcall presents some distinct advantages and disadvantages, as with any scheme or play in football.

The strength of man coverage, is that by assigning players specific man assignments, we guarantee that each and every eligible receiver will be accounted for by a defender, regardless of where they line up pre-snap, and where they go after the ball is hiked. By assigning each receiver a defender, we also present a much tighter coverage to the quarterback, meaning that if he wants to complete a pass, he will have to make an accurate throw, as there will always be a defender lurking nearby, ready to make a play on the ball.

These are also very simple schemes – each defensive player in coverage is responsible for covering an offensive player, and each member of the front seven is responsible for a different gap in the run game – that's it.

The flip side to that coin is that with each defender solely responsible for his man, any mistakes they may make are magnified. A misread or bite on a double move could mean a wide open receiver, and with every other defender – except perhaps a safety, depending on the playcall – focused on their own responsibilities, there is very little in the way of help. This applies to option plays, draws, scrambles and screens as well – a defender can be run off into no man's land away from the action and by the time he realizes it, a single broken tackle by the ball carrier can have just gone for a huge gain.

The three base man defenses we're going to look at in this playbook are the 'Cover 1', 'Cover 2', and 'Cover 0' man coverages, each presenting their own advantages and disadvantages.

Base 4-3 - Cover 1

Play Design

The 'Cover 1' relies on good man coverage skills from your secondary and help over the top from a free safety who is strong in coverage. For this play to be effective, it's important that all routes are forced back to the middle of the field, where the defenders have help from their teammates.

Strengths

The man coverage will put pressure on the quarterback to make accurate throws, which will be even tougher since the strong safety will be manning up on the tight end as opposed to the Sam linebacker in a Cover 2. This play will also allow you to deter the offense from running by loading up an eight man box before the play.

Weaknesses

With only one safety deep, this play can be vulnerable if the offense calls multiple routes downfield.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The front four will look to penetrate upfield and get to the quarterback, forcing a quick throw and limiting the amount of time the defense is forced to defend in man coverage.

Linebackers: The linebackers will be responsible for covering the running backs, with the Will or Sam linebackers taking the first running back to come out on their side, and the Mike linebacker taking the second running back if two come out the same side. If the running backs stay in to block, or the linebacker is otherwise not needed in man coverage, they can zone up on the inside and read the quarterback's eyes.

Secondary: The corners will be lined up close to the line of scrimmage, playing press man coverage on the wide receivers, playing with an outside shade. The strong safety will come up as well, lining up in front of the tight end and playing man coverage on him in any passing situation. The free safety will drop back, responsible for any deep routes from sideline to sideline.

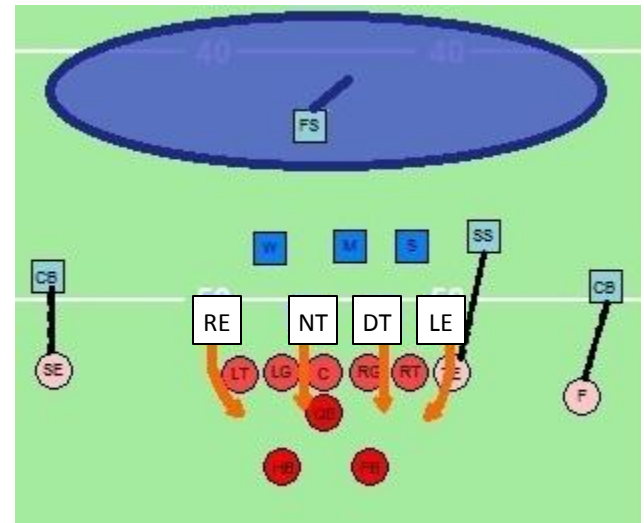


Figure 2: Cover 1 Man Defense.

Base 4-3 - Cover 2 Man

Play Design

With corners playing to the inside of their assignments, this man coverage scheme is trying to push the receivers out to the sideline while providing top down help from two safeties over the top.

Strengths

With two deep safeties, both the corners and Sam backer can play tough press coverage and slow down the development of the routes without having to worry about getting beat off the line with no help.

Weaknesses

A talented pass catching tight end might be a tough matchup for your Sam backer, and there isn't much help to the middle of the field if either of your corners get beat inside.

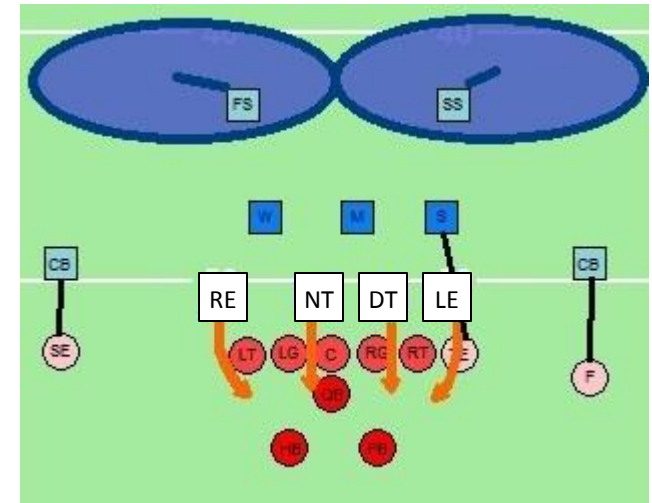


Figure 3: Cover 2 Man Defense.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: Once again getting to the quarterback as quickly as possible.

Linebackers: The Sam backer is playing man coverage on the tight end, while the Will backer will take the first running back to come out to his side, and the Mike backer doing the same with the strong side. If their assignment stays in to block, the linebackers can either do a delayed rush of the quarterback, or sink back and read the quarterback's eyes.

Secondary: The corners will play press coverage at the line with an inside shade, while the two deep safeties will play deep zones, not allowing any offensive player to get farther downfield than them.

Cover 0 – All Out Blitz

Play Design

The 'Cover 0' brings in seven players rushing the quarterback, attempting to create pressure and get either a sack, force a bad decision, or force a bad throw.

Strengths

The heavy pressure means the quarterback won't have a chance to throw to any long developing routes, and if the quarterback panics the free safety should have a good chance to make a play on any passes made over the middle of the field.

Weaknesses

With no players providing any help over the top, the defense is very susceptible to both an easy completion as well as a big play if the rush can't get to the quarterback in time.

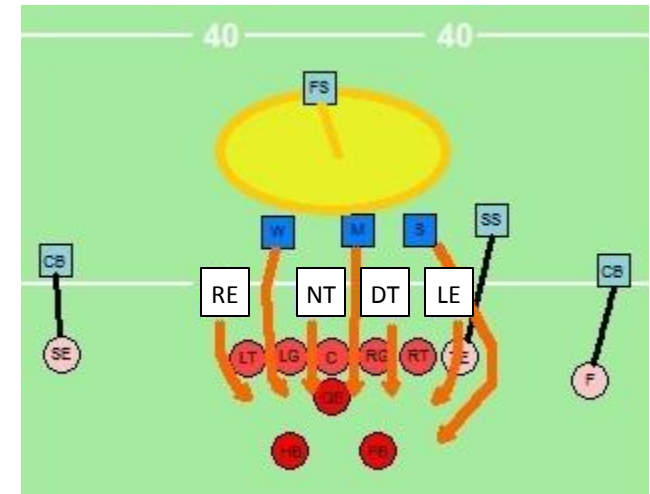


Figure 4: Cover 0 All Out Blitz.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: Rushing the quarterback, but this time they have other rushers coming. They need to stay in their lanes and force the offensive line to choose between blocking the defensive line or sliding over and protecting their gaps from the crashing linebackers.

Linebackers: All three linebackers will blitz, with the Will linebacker coming in between the left tackle and left guard, the Mike linebacker coming in between the center and right guard, and the Sam linebacker blitzing around the edge, outside of the tight end.

Secondary: The strong safety will come up next to the Sam linebacker, ready to man up on the tight end in coverage. The corners will play either press coverage or provide a small cushion, but either way they will play with an outside shade, forcing the receivers back into the middle of the field where the free safety will be playing a hook zone.

Base 4-3 – Zone Coverages

Next, we're going to have a look at several plays in which the defense plays zone coverage.

The beauty of zone coverage is that athleticism immediately becomes much less of a priority – since our defense isn't attempting to go stride for stride with the offense's best athletes, you can play a more cerebral player who maybe isn't as quick as the next guy, but has a knack for reading receiver's routes and quarterback's eyes. In that same vein, a single mistake doesn't result in a wide open receiver going for a big play – instead resulting in an opening that the offense may or may not be able to recognize and take advantage of.

You will, however, need to switch your coverages up, or you can get exposed by certain route concepts – for example, a smart coach might recognize that you always play cover two on first and 10, dialing up the four verticals concept, putting your safeties in a tough spot. The passing windows will also be bigger, and a pass that might have gotten deflected against man coverage could squeeze through against a zone.

Another great thing about running zone coverages is that it's actually more effective against the run game as well. In man coverage, defenders can be tricked into following their man, abandoning their run gap responsibilities just long enough that the offense can squeeze by. In a zone defense, all the players in coverage will immediately take a step back and look into the quarterback's eyes, ensuring that they are completely aware of what the offense intends to do that play.

To get started, we're going to have a look at three zone coverages – the cover 2, the cover 3, and the cover 4 – and closely examine the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Base 4-3 - Cover 2 Zone

Play Design

The 'Cover 2' has seven defenders dropping back into zone coverage, with five of them covering underneath zones, allowing for a focus on disrupting the short passing game.

Strengths

Strong against the short to intermediate range passing game, and allows for press coverage from the corners which will slow down route development and give your pass rush a little more time to get to the quarterback.

Weaknesses

There is a window behind the corners along the sideline that can be tough for a defense to account for while still maintaining their other responsibilities. The same is true of the safeties, as they are forced to account for a large amount of grass.

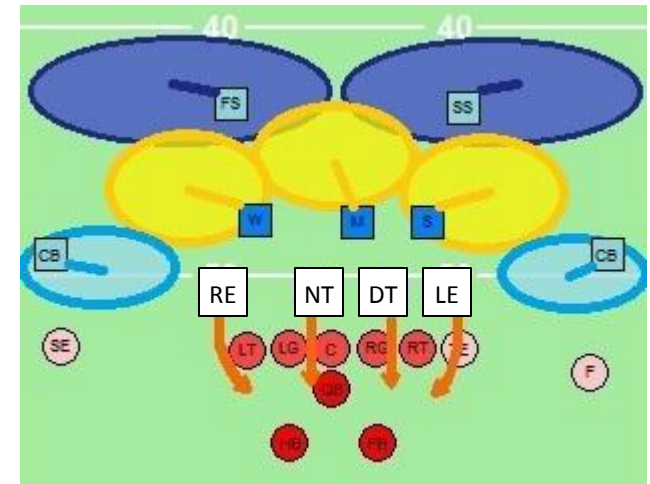


Figure 5: Cover 2 Zone Defense.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The front four will again look to penetrate upfield and get to the quarterback.

Linebackers: The linebackers will each play hook zones with the Sam and Will linebackers each stepping wide and the Mike linebacker playing the middle hook zone while also watching for any routes that are looking to go right up the seam and split the safeties.

Secondary: The free safety and strong safety will both begin deep, lining up as wide as the widest man on the offensive line, before dropping wider and deeper once the ball has been snapped, each responsible for any deep throws to their respective sides of the field. The corners will again jam the receivers, taking away the outside and forcing the receivers to go inside where they have help. They will then sit down in the flats.

Base 4-3 - Cover 3 Zone

Play Design

The 'Cover 3', with the three representing the number of deep zones, discourages the deep ball while still providing good support for the short passing game underneath.

Strengths

Limits the range need by each defender playing a deep zone, with them able to focus on just on third of the field. It's also a very versatile play, and depending on the depth at which the corners play can be very solid against the run.

Weaknesses

With the corners bailing deep and the Will linebacker and strong safety hustling to get out to the flats, this play can be vulnerable to the quick short passing game, since both corners as well as the free safety will be about 15-20 yards off the line of scrimmage.

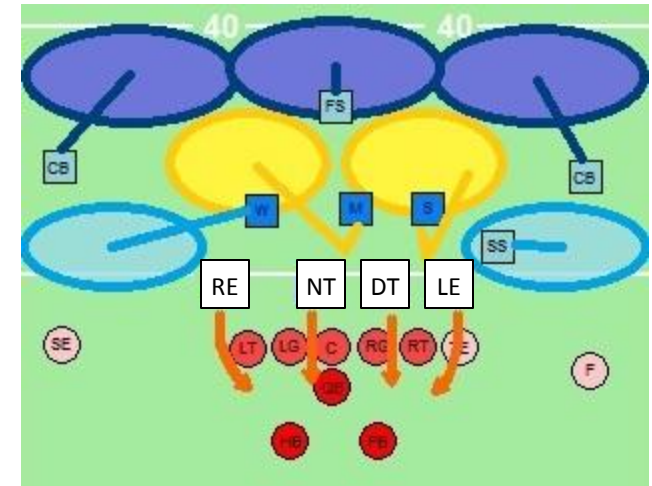


Figure 6: Cover 3 Zone Defense.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The front four will be responsible for getting upfield and creating pressure on the quarterback.

Linebackers: The Will linebacker will step out to cover the flat on the weak side, while the Mike and Sam linebackers will step up on the snap to do their read steps, before taking a couple steps back and settling into middle hook zones.

Secondary: The corners will start off well off the line of scrimmage, then drop back into deep zones, each responsible for everything deep from the hash mark to the sidelines on their side of the field. The free safety will start off in the middle field deep, and drop back from there, where he'll be responsible for the deep throws between the hash marks. The strong safety will cover the flat on the strong side.

Base 4-3 - Cover 4 Zone

Play Design

Coaches will typically call the 'Cover 4' in an obvious passing situation, where the offense needs 15 yards or more and you know they're going to be looking for the deep ball.

Strengths

The 'Cover 4' is very effective against any deep passes, with all four members of the secondary ready to prevent a deep ball.

Weaknesses

This is a formation that is committed to stopping not only the pass, but specifically the deep pass, as this play is susceptible to the short and intermediate passing games as well as the running game.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The defensive line will look to get to the quarterback quickly and prevent their teammates from being exposed in zone coverage for too long.

Linebackers: The Will backer will head out to the weak side flat, with the Sam backer headed out to the flat on the strong side. The Mike backer will play the hook zone, covering the middle of the field.

Secondary: Both safeties will start back, and the corners will give the receivers a large cushion pre-snap, before all four members of the secondary backpedal and each take a quarter of the field with their own respective deep zones.

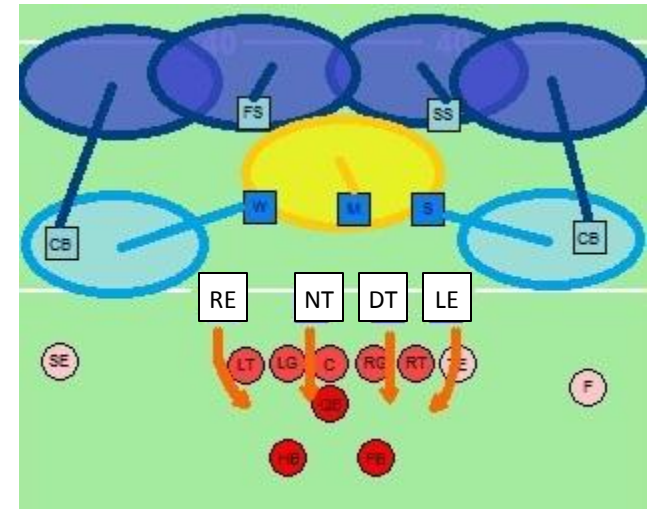


Figure 7: Cover 4 Zone Defense.

Man Blitzes

After your base defense is installed, you get to the fun part – or at least that's what all the players will say – the blitzes. First we're going to have a look at the man blitzes we can run from this scheme.

There are plenty of different ways you can throw a man blitz at the offense, from single linebacker blitzes, to single defensive back blitzes, and even linebacker and defensive back packages as well. The great part about all of them, is that the added pressure on the quarterback from the extra rusher does not compromise the tightness of the coverage – each player is still being covered 1 on 1, and the quarterback is going to have to fit the ball into a tight window to complete the pass.

The only problem is that with only one – and in some cases zero – safeties behind the defense, one single mistake in that tight coverage and the player will be wide open, most likely going for a big play. This leads to players being extremely focused on their own personal man to man responsibilities, leading to potential tackling issues - especially on quarterback scrambles or yards after the catch for the receiver.

It can definitely be a higher risk proposition than the zone blitz, but the beauty of the man blitz is that there is no risk at all in confusing the players. The coverage rules are extremely simple, and no matter how many blitzers you decide to send, all running gaps and offensive players are accounted for.

To break the following plays, we're going to start with some simple linebacker blitzes and finish off by looking at a couple package blitzes for when you really want to put the heat on.

Mike (Monster) Blitz

Play Design

A modified 'Cover 1' look, where we'll bring additional pressure to the 'A' gap with our Mike linebacker.

Strengths

With an extra pass rusher attacking the middle of the offensive line, we'll look to either get a sack or collapse the quarterback's pocket and force a bad decision. The tight man coverage will also force the quarterback to be very accurate with his passes under duress.

Weaknesses

By removing a man in coverage, we leave the intermediate throw over the middle of the field as a much easier target to hit for the quarterback if he's able to avoid the rush. Also, with only one safety deep, there is a bigger threat of the deep ball potentially being completed. Lastly, one mistake by any of the men in coverage will lead to an easy completion if the quarterback can identify it.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The defensive line will rush their normal gaps, trying to get quick pressure on the quarterback.

Linebackers: The Will and Sam backers will man up on the running backs on their respective sides of the field. The Mike backer however will blitz, attacking the 'A' gap between the center and right guard.

Secondary: The corners will play man press coverage, with an outside shade, with the strong safety playing man coverage on the tight end as well. Deep in the middle of the field, the free safety will be the lone high safety, reading the quarterback's eyes and making sure no receivers get behind him.

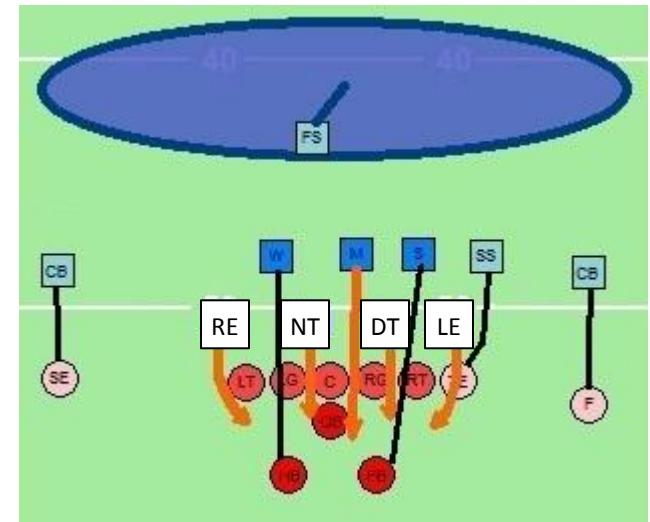


Figure 8: Monster Blitz.

Sam (SAMson) Blitz

Play Design

Here we look to attack the strong side of the formation, with the Sam linebacker coming on a blitz to the 'B' gap while the rest of the defense plays gives a 'Cover 1' look.

Strengths

By bringing an extra rusher to the strong side, we put extra pass blocking pressure on the side of the offensive line that is traditionally better suited to run blocking. And if the quarterback sees the rush coming, he will likely be forced out to the left side, where most right handed quarterbacks are much less comfortable. The man coverage behind the blitz will also force the quarterback to make an accurate throw.

Weaknesses

With the blitz coming into the quarterback's field of vision, it will be easier for him to see the blitz coming and go to his hot-read, and once again, with only one deep safety and the rest of the men in coverage playing one on one, it only takes one mistake for a receiver to potentially get wide open.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The defensive line will rush their regular gaps, trying to beat their blockers and get to the quarterback.

Linebackers: At the snap of the ball, the Sam linebacker will blitz, attacking the 'B' gap behind the strong side defensive tackle. The Will linebacker will man up on the weak side running back and the Mike linebacker will man up on the strong side running back.

Secondary: The corners will line up in man press coverage with an outside shade, and the strong safety will man up on the tight end. Behind them, the free safety will play a deep zone, making sure nothing can get over top of him.

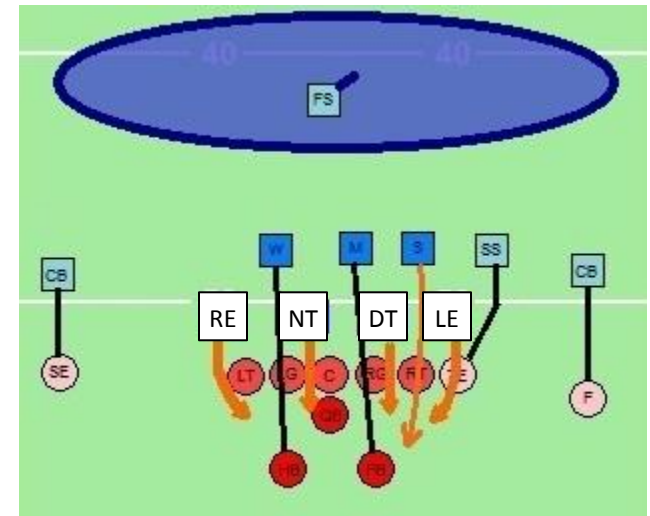


Figure 9: Samson Blitz.

Will (Warrior) Blitz

Play Design

This more aggressive version of the 'Cover 1' look brings the Will linebacker on a 'B' gap blitz to the weak side of the formation.

Strengths

Here the blitz comes to the quarterback's blind side, so if the pass rush can beat their blockers there's a very small chance the quarterback will be able to react in time. There's also a good opportunity to go for the strip sack, since the quarterback won't be able to tuck in and protect the ball if he can't see the defender coming. Once again, the tight man coverage will also force the quarterback to fit the ball into a small window.

Weaknesses

Generally, the best pass blockers on the offensive line will be protecting the quarterback's blind side, making it tougher to beat them with the blitz. And if the blitz is unable to create a significant pass rush, the defense will be isolated in coverage - meaning one mistake could mean an easy completion and maybe even a big gain.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: All four defensive linemen will rush their gaps, looking to defeat a block and get into the backfield.

Linebackers: The Sam linebacker will man up on the first running back out the strong side of the backfield, with the Mike linebacker taking the first running back to come out on the weak side. The Will linebacker will blitz, attacking the 'B' gap and looking to get after the quarterback.

Secondary: Both corners will play with an outside shade, playing man press coverage at the line. The strong safety will man up on the tight end, and the free safety will play center field, reading the quarterback's eyes and making sure no receivers get behind him.

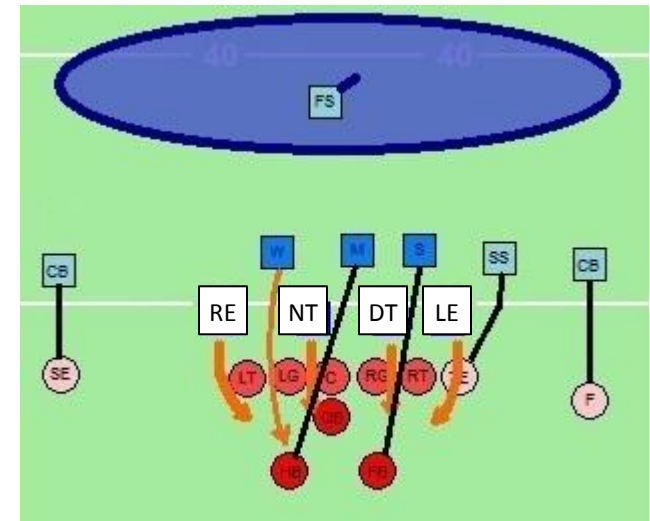


Figure 10: Warrior Blitz.

Strong Safety (Suicide) Blitz

Play Design

The Suicide blitz sends our strong safety in off the edge of the strong side of the offensive line to blitz the quarterback, with the rest of the defense playing 'Cover 1' behind him.

Strengths

Sending the strong safety on a blitz can catch the pass blockers by surprise, as we are sending a fast player that is usually back in pass coverage. If timed correctly, the offensive line likely won't be able to pick up the safety, forcing either a running back to pick him up or the quarterback to get the ball out before the safety can get to him. If the quarterback does get the ball out in time, he'll be faced with tight man coverage and small windows on every receiver, meaning a near-perfect throw will be necessary to complete the pass.

Weaknesses

By removing one of our best cover men from the secondary and sending him on a blitz, the defense can be exposed in coverage if the blitz is picked up – especially if the tight end the Sam linebacker is picking up is a talented receiver. Also, with each defender in coverage on his own separate island, a single mistake can lead to a big play for the offense.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The defensive line will rush the passer, attacking their normal gaps.

Linebackers: The Will linebacker will man up on the weak side running back, the Mike linebacker will man up on the strong side running back, and the Sam linebacker will man up on the tight end.

Secondary: The corners will play man press coverage, playing an outside shade to force the receivers back inside toward the free safety playing a deep zone. The strong safety, starting off up in the box, will blitz the quarterback, coming off the strong side edge.

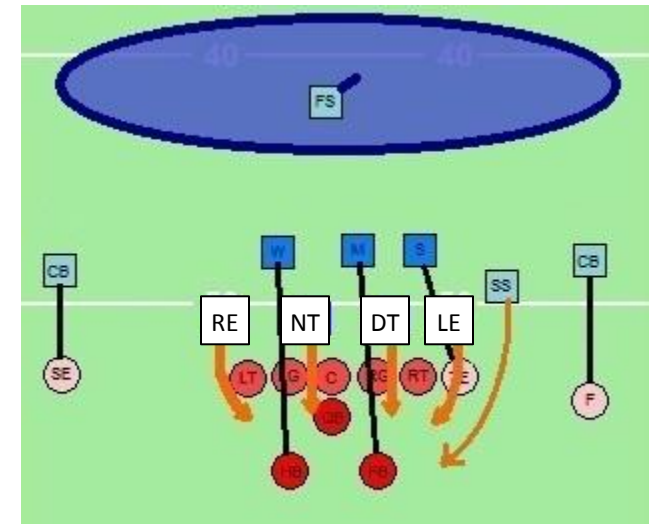


Figure 11: Suicide Blitz.

Free Safety (FREEky) Blitz

Play Design

To execute the Freeky blitz, we're going to have our free safety fly up to the line of scrimmage on the first words out of the quarterback's mouth. As this happens, the strong safety will drop back, taking the free safety's position as the lone deep safety.

The free safety will then blitz the weak side of the offensive line, with the rest of the defense playing 'Cover 1' with the strong safety now replacing the free safety in his role as the deep zone

Strengths

The free safety is the last person the quarterback or offensive line would expect to be coming on a blitz, making it very tough for them to make the necessary protection adjustments.

When it is timed perfectly – and your free safety will get better at this with more practice – it is near unblockable, and will force the quarterback to get rid of the ball immediately to his hot read or just throw it out of bounds – if he even sees it coming. Even if he is able to make the correct read and throw to his receiver, the quarterback will be forced to make a very accurate throw under heavy pressure due to the tight man coverage.

Weaknesses

By bringing the player on the team best suited to playing the lone deep zone from sideline to sideline on a blitz, we put our strong safety, who is for the most part better suited to run support and maybe not quite as athletic or instinctual in the pass game as the free safety, in a tough position.

Also, our Sam linebacker, like our corners, is forced into playing one on one man coverage, meaning a misstep of any kind could result in a big play.

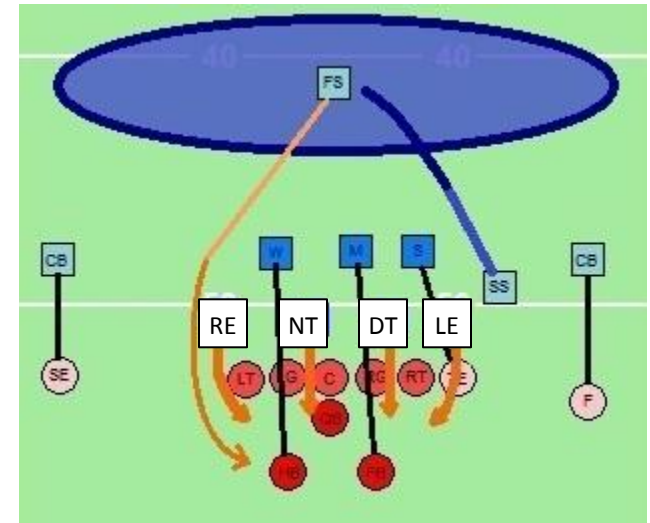


Figure 12: Freeky Blitz.

Free Safety (FREEky) Blitz (continued)

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The defensive linemen will look to beat their man and sack the quarterback, all rushing their normal gaps.

Linebackers: The linebackers will all be in man coverage – the Will linebacker on the weakside running back, the Mike linebacker on the strong side running back, and the Sam linebacker on the strong side tight end.

Secondary: The defense will start with the free safety as the lone deep safety and the strong safety playing up in the box on the strong side. On the first words out of the quarterbacks mouth, the free safety will come up to the line of scrimmage on the weak side of the line while the strong safety drops back to the free safety's old spot, deep in the middle of the field. The corners will play man press coverage, forcing their matchup back towards the middle of the field, and the free safety will blitz off the weak side edge once the ball is snapped.

Sam & Mike (SMash) LB Blitz

Play Design

The Smash blitz, in which we bring both the Sam and Mike linebackers, brings heavy pressure to the strong side of the formation, sending six total rushers while the remaining defenders play 'Cover 1' behind, leaving the strong side running back uncovered.

Strengths

The advantages presented by the Smash blitz are very similar to those in the Sam blitz, only that we're bringing pressure from the middle as well. This means that unless the play calls for a tight end or running back to stay in and block, the pass rushers will outnumber the blockers, meaning at least one free runner at the quarterback. He will be forced to throw the ball to his hot read, out of bounds, or take the sack. With 'Cover 1' coverage behind the blitz, and the corners playing press coverage at the line, the quarterback will have to fit the ball through a very small window to complete the pass.

Weaknesses

With the secondary playing Cover 1 press, the corners and strong safety are put in a position where a single misstep is a potentially huge play for the offense. And by sending six rushers with a man coverage scheme behind, there will be one player – the fullback – completely uncovered. If the quarterback is able to identify the blitz and get the ball out quickly, whether by dumping it off to the full back or some kind of screen or quick slant, a broken tackle or two will result in a touchdown.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: All four defensive linemen will rush the passer playing their normal gaps.

Linebackers: The Will linebacker will play man coverage on the weak side running back, while the Mike and Sam linebackers blitz on the snap of the ball – the Mike linebacker coming up the strong 'A' gap, and the Sam linebacker coming up the strong 'B' gap.

Secondary: The corners will play man press with an outside shade, while the free safety plays a lone deep zone. The strong safety will start off up in the box, playing man defense on the tight end.

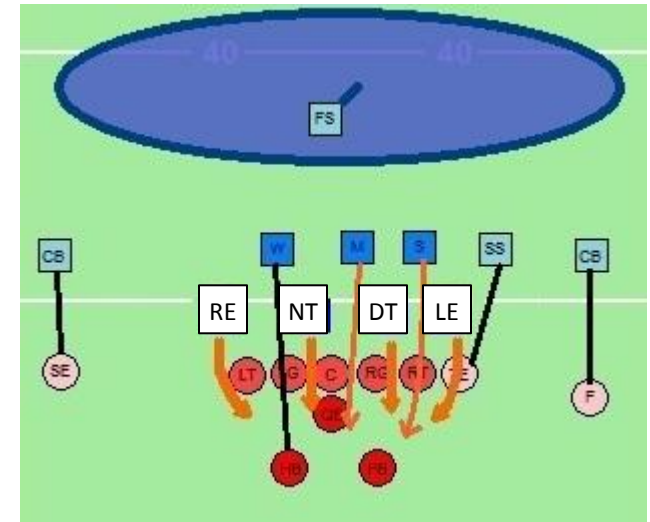


Figure 13: Smash LB Blitz.

Will & Mike (WhaM) LB Blitz

Play Design

The Wham blitz attacks every gap on the offensive line, sending the Will and Mike linebackers at the quarterback while the rest of the defense plays Cover 1 behind. With six pass rushers headed for the quarterback, the defense is forced to leave one player unaccounted for – the weak side running back.

Strengths

With only five offensive linemen, that means that unless the protection scheme calls for additional blockers to stay in, at least one player will have a free run at the quarterback. The quarterback will be forced to get the ball out to his hot read, throw the ball away, or take the sack. And with the rest of the defense playing Cover 1 press behind the blitz, the quarterback will be forced to fit the ball into a tight window.

Weaknesses

There is a lot of pressure on the secondary to be strong in coverage, as they are all playing one on one man coverage. The free safety is back playing a deep zone, but a bite on a fake or misstep could mean a wide open receiver and an easy completion for the offense.

Also, since both the Will and Mike linebackers are coming on the blitz and the Sam linebacker covering the strong side running back, the weak side running back will be unaccounted for, meaning a quick dump off pass could go for a solid gain if the quarterback is able to recognize the coverage and get the ball out quickly enough.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The defensive line will rush their normal gaps, looking to beat a block and sack the quarterback.

Linebackers: The Will linebacker will blitz the weak side 'B' gap, while the Mike linebacker blitzes the strong 'A' gap. The Sam linebacker will play man coverage on the strong side running back.

Secondary: The corners will play man press coverage, funneling the receivers back to their help as the free safety plays the lone deep zone. The strong safety will start off up in the box, and play man coverage on the tight end.

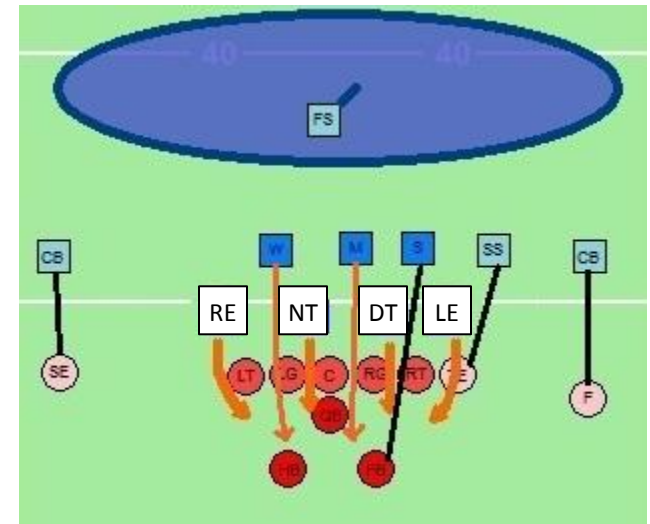


Figure 14: Wham LB Blitz.

Sam & Will (SWord) LB Blitz

Play Design

For this next play, we're going to blitz both outside linebackers. We call this the Sword blitz. The rest of the defense will stay in Cover 1, with the corners playing man press on the outside, and the strong safety covering the tight end. The Mike linebacker will cover the strong side linebacker, and the free safety will play deep while keeping an eye on the weak side running back.

Strengths

This blitz does a great job of overloading the outside of the offensive line, giving both the Sam and Will linebackers a chance to get after the quarterback. Unless the offensive has called for a protection scheme in which a running back or tight end stays in to block, the offensive line will be outnumbered 6-5, with at least one player coming on a free run at the quarterback. This will force a quick decision, and with the secondary playing man press coverage, the quarterback will need to be quick and accurate to complete a pass before the rush can get to him.

Weaknesses

Our secondary is completely isolated in one on one matchups. There is some help over the top with the deep free safety, but if a receiver can beat the press coverage off the line, he could potentially get wide open and go for a big gain. There's also the potential of a running play going for a big gain, as the secondary will be so concerned with their pass play assignments that they won't be able to help initially in the running game.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The defensive linemen will rush the quarterback, playing their normal gaps.

Linebackers: The Will linebacker will blitz the weak side 'B' gap, and the Sam linebacker will blitz the strong side 'B' gap. The Mike linebacker will sit back, reading the strong side running back and manning up if necessary.

Secondary: The free safety will play a deep zone while also keeping an eye on the weak side running back. The strong safety, starting off up in the box, will play man coverage on the tight end, and the corners will use an outside shade while playing man press coverage.

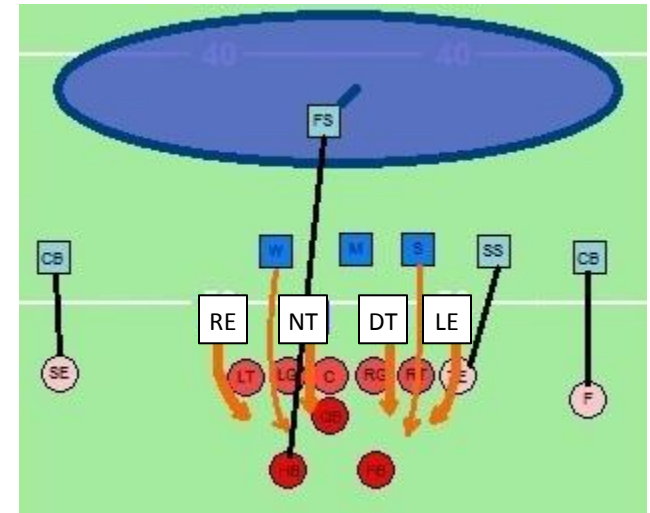


Figure 15: Sword LB Blitz.

Sam, Will & Mike (SWarM) LB Blitz

Play Design

The Swarm blitz can be deadly when used effectively – it involves sending all three linebackers along with the defensive line. Starting from a Cover 1 look, the secondary will all play man coverage, with the free safety picking up the weak side running back.

Strengths

This blitz is absolutely overwhelming, regardless of the protection scheme. With seven rushers coming at the quarterback, it will be extremely difficult for the quarterback to even get the ball out of his hands – and even if they do, the tight man coverage means it needs to be a pass that is not only timely, but very accurate.

Weaknesses

While most blitz packages are going to put an increased amount of pressure on your secondary, the Swarm blitz will really put them in a tight spot. The corners are asked to play press coverage on the outside, and both safeties will be playing man coverage on their assignments. With no help whatsoever, one simple mistake can mean a quick six points for the offense.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The defensive line will attack their normal gaps, looking to beat an offensive lineman and get to the quarterback.

Linebackers: All three linebackers will blitz – the Will linebacker taking the weak 'B' gap, the Mike linebacker taking the strong 'A' gap, and the Sam linebacker taking the strong 'B' gap.

Secondary: The corners will play man press coverage with an outside shade, while the strong safety mans up on the tight end. The free safety will play center field, eyeing the weak side back while staying ready to help on any inside breaking routes from the receivers.

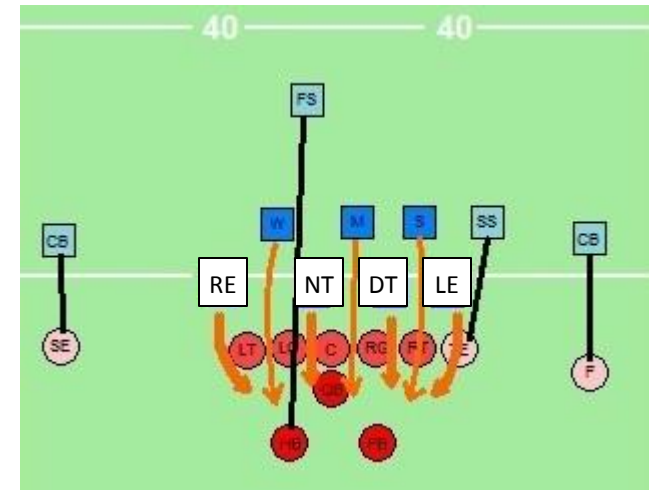


Figure 16: Swarm LB Blitz.

Zone Blitzes

Zone blitzes share many of the same characteristics of zone coverage – the defense has their eyes on the quarterback so they can be aware of the run game, a single mistake in coverage won't hurt you nearly as much, and the quarterback is still going to have a bigger window to throw in. However, there are some differences as well.

The first of which is a double edged sword. Confusion. That is the zone blitz' breadwinner. A quarterback will drop back, see a player blitzing and think a hole will open up there only for a defensive lineman to drop back just as he releases the ball. Why is this a double edged sword? Because it can be just as confusing for the defense as it is for the quarterback and offensive line. You're going to see players making mental errors when you run zone blitzes, and its your job to prevent as many from happening on your side of the ball as possible.

It's confusing for the offensive line and quarterback because players are skirting their normal responsibilities, moving around to new and unpredictable positions on the field both before and after the snap. This can also be both a strength and a weakness. Yes, the offense won't expect the defensive end to drop into a flat zone, but that's with good reason – he is best suited to rushing the passer, not playing coverage.

It's also important to remember that you can send as many blitzers as you like, but keep in mind that for every player you send to rush the passer, you are increasing the size of the zones the rest of the players need to patrol.

Ultimately, the key to remember with zone blitzes is unpredictability and deception. In the next nine plays, you will learn plenty of ways to be just that, with everything from a double safety blitz to a simple middle linebacker fire zone.

CB (Cover 2 Look 22) Blitz

Play Design

Bringing pressure from an untraditional place, the corner blitz allows you to send one of the most athletic players on the field full tilt right at the quarterback.

This play presents a 'Cover 2' look, but at the first sound out of the quarterback's mouth, the blitzing corner will move inside and up to the line of scrimmage, with the free safety, strong safety, and remaining corner will roll into a 'Cover 3' look.

Strengths

Sending the blitz from a very unconventional location and with one of the most athletic players on the field can make it very tough for the pass blockers to adjust without leaving holes elsewhere.

This kind of blitz will usually force a throw to a hot read, which a savvy linebacker may be able to sniff out and make a play on. And with three players deep, there is little risk of the offense going for a big play despite sending a member of the secondary on a blitz.

Weaknesses

The Will, Mike and Sam linebackers are asked to cover a lot of field on the underneath throws, and with all three remaining members of the secondary bailing to deep zones, this play is vulnerable to short passes and especially a well timed screen.

Also, if the quarterback makes the correct read, he doesn't need to be as accurate with his pass as he would be against man coverage.

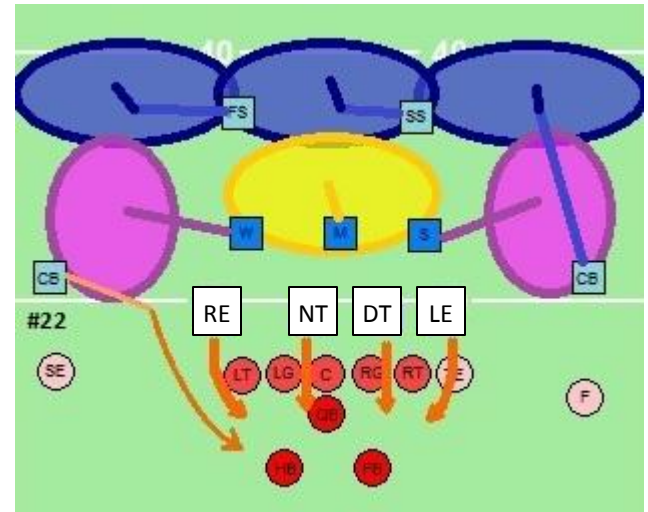


Figure 17: Cover 2 Look 22 Blitz.

CB (Cover 2 Look 22) Blitz (continued)

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The defensive line will play their normal gaps, trying to beat and offensive lineman and get to the quarterback.

Linebackers: The three linebackers will be in zone coverage, with the Will linebacker playing a weak side curl to flat zone, the Mike linebacker playing a middle hook zone, and the Sam linebacker playing the strong side curl to flat zone.

Secondary: The secondary will begin in their regular Cover 2 alignment, but on the first words out of the quarterback's mouth, will all shift, starting with the blitzing corner – in this case number 22 – sliding up to the line of scrimmage and over closer to the offensive line.

The rest of the secondary will follow suit, with the free safety replacing the blitzing corner as the deep zone on the left third of the field, the strong safety replacing the free safety as the deep zone in the middle third of the field, and the right corner dropping back to play the deep zone on the right side of the field.

Combined with the linebackers, this will create a Cover 3 look, either confusing the quarterback into throwing into what he thought would be an open area, or allowing the blitzing corner enough time to sack the quarterback.

Play Design

Presenting a cover 2 look, this blitz will allow you to send two of the most explosive athletes on the field at the quarterback off the edge. On the first sound out of the quarterback's mouth, both corners will walk inside as the safeties both walk outside, lining up over top of the receivers on their respective sides of the field.

At the snap of the ball, the corners will blitz while the Will and Mike linebackers will drop back into hook zones, the safeties will play curl to flat zones on the outside, and the Sam linebacker will play the tight end in man to man coverage. This is a play best used scarcely, as it is at it's most effective when the offense doesn't see it coming.

Strengths

By sending both corners off the edge of the line, there is a ton of pressure on the offensive line to pick up the correct blocking assignments, especially since the blitz is coming from such an unusual area of the field.

Unless the offense is in max protection – and even if they are – more often than not at least one player will get a free run at the quarterback, forcing him to make an extremely quick decision. This play is a big gamble, but the potential reward – either a sack or an interception on a hurried throw – is well worth the risk.

Weaknesses

By blitzing the two best cover players on the field at the quarterback, there is a lot of pressure on your safeties and linebackers to cover reliably. Also, with no players in deep zones, if the offense is able to hold off the blitz somehow, the defense will be vulnerable to throws overs the top or up the seam.

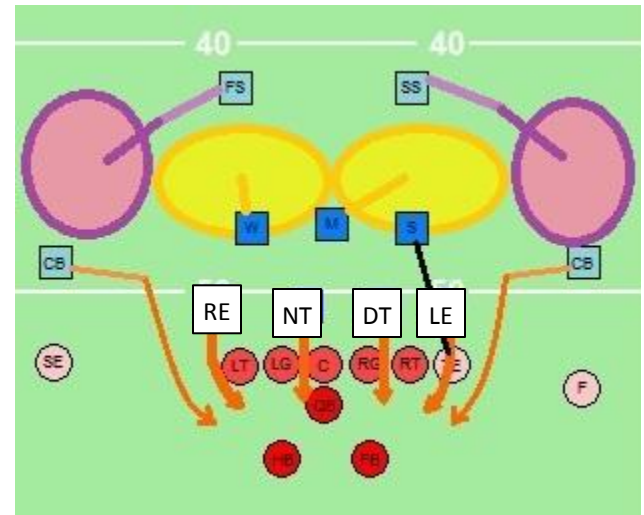


Figure 18: Cover 2 Look 0 Blitz.

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: All four defensive linemen will rush the quarterback, playing their normal gaps and looking to make a play in the backfield.

Linebackers: The Will and Mike linebackers will be in zone coverage, both playing hook zones, with the Will taking the weak side middle and Mike linebacker sliding over to the strong side middle. The Sam linebacker however will play tight man to man coverage on the tight end.

Secondary: From the Cover 2 look, the secondary will wait until they hear the first sound out of the quarterback's mouth. At that moment, both corners will slide up to the line of scrimmage and in towards the defensive line, ready to blitz the quarterback once the ball is hiked. The safeties will split, each moving a couple yards up and towards the sidelines so as to be in a better position to play the curl to flat zones that will be their responsibilities once the play has begun.

Free & Strong (Tornado) Safety Blitz

Play Design

One of the more exotic blitzes that you'll see is the tornado blitz. Starting from a Cover 2 look, on the first sound out of the quarterback's mouth, both safeties will walk up to the line of scrimmage on their respective sides of the field, as both corners drop back deep.

The safeties will then blitz off the edge as the Will linebacker as well as both corners drop back into deep zones, with the Mike linebacker playing a hook zone and the Sam linebacker manning up on the tight end.

Strengths

The safeties are fast, agile players with a good nose for the football, and a well timed safety blitz is among the most difficult assignments for any protection scheme to account for, often meaning at least one player will get through the line unblocked.

Even if the protection is somehow able to deal with the blitz, most quarterbacks first instinct will be to throw where the blitz is coming from – but with three defenders in deep zones and another patrolling the middle of the field, there is little threat of the offense going for a big play.

Weaknesses

By sending the two players best suited to protect the back end of the defense at the quarterback, the defense is forced to make concessions elsewhere on the field.

The first is that the Will linebacker is forced to play the middle deep zone of the cover 3, and even if he's great in coverage, he's just not going to be able to cover as much ground as either of the safeties would in the same position. Also, with the corners dropping back into deep zones as well, the flats are wide open, leaving the defense susceptible to a well timed screen or swing pass.

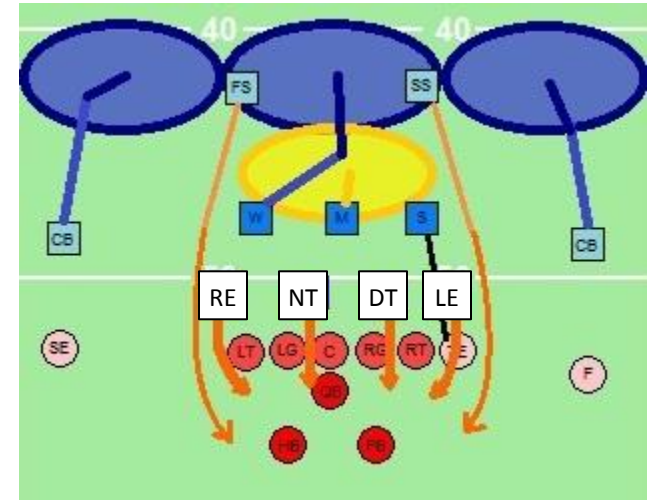


Figure 19: Tornado Safety Blitz.

Free & Strong (Tornado) Safety Blitz (continued)

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The defensive line will play their regular gaps, looking to defeat a block and sack the quarterback.

Linebackers: The Will linebacker will be replacing the free safety in the deep zone over the middle third of the field. Upon hearing the first words out of the quarterback's mouth, he will begin to move backwards and over to the center of the field so as to be in a better position to play his coverage responsibilities when the ball is snapped. The Mike linebacker will play a middle hook zone, and the Sam linebacker will play tight man coverage on the tight end.

Secondary: The secondary will begin lined up in a Cover 2 look, but on the first words out of the quarterback's mouth, the corners will begin to drop back deep as the safeties will simultaneously move up to the line of scrimmage. When the ball is snapped, the corners will be responsible for the deep zones on their respective sides of the field and the safeties will both be blitzing off the edge, trying to sack the quarterback.

Will FIRE ZONE

Play Design

Beginning from a Cover 1 look, the Will Fire Zone will then drop back into a cover 3 look once the ball is snapped, with one small change.

On the snap of the ball, the weak side defensive end will step up to engage the left tackle momentarily, giving the Will linebacker enough time to run past and blitz the quarterback. After this brief step up, the weak side end will then step back, taking the Will linebacker's position in the Cover 3 look, playing the flat on the weak side of the formation.

Strengths

This can be very confusing for both the offensive line and quarterback. If the feint by the defensive end is effective enough, the Will linebacker will face an offensive line that is initially more concerned with blocking a player that has no intention of even rushing the quarterback, allowing him to get a one on one matchup, or even a free run if the left guard is double teaming the nose tackle with the center.

The quarterback could make a similar mistake - believing that there is a hole in the cover 3 at the weak side flat. This is of course not true – the defensive end has that responsibility – but the quarterback is not used to accounting for defensive ends when making their reads and will often throw there without ever even seeing the defensive end.

Weaknesses

The downside to dropping a defensive end into coverage is that their strength lies in rushing the quarterback – not playing pass coverage. Not only will they likely be much slower than the Will linebacker would be in the same position, but the ball skills will often be much weaker, meaning even if they are in position to get a hand on the ball or even intercept it, there is no guarantee they'll make the play.

There's also the chance that it could be confusing for the defensive end in the same way it is for the offense, as for the most part, this is not something they are used to or comfortable doing very often.

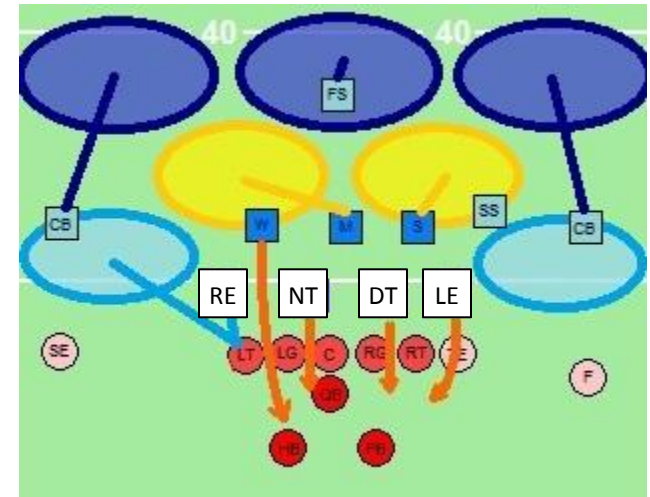


Figure 20: Will Fire Zone.

Will FIRE ZONE (continued)

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The nose tackle, defensive tackle, and strong side end will all rush the quarterback, playing their normal gaps. The weak side end however will step up and engage the left tackle as if he too is about to rush the quarterback, before dropping back to play a flat zone on the weak side of the field.

Linebackers: The Will linebacker will blitz the 'B' gap, taking advantage of the confusion created by the defensive end. The Mike linebacker and Sam linebacker will play hook zones, with the Mike linebacker sliding over to play the weak side and the Sam linebacker staying on the strong side.

Secondary: From the Cover 1 alignment, with the strong safety up in the box, the corners will drop back at the hike of the ball, each playing a deep zone on their side of the field while the free safety takes care of the deep zone over the middle third. This leaves the strong safety playing the strong side flat.

Sam FIRE ZONE

Play Design

The Sam Fire Zone will begin from a Cover 1 look, with the defense dropping back into Cover 3 once the ball has been snapped.

However, instead of just rushing the passer, the strong side defensive end is going to step up to engage the offensive line just long enough to give the Sam linebacker time to come up and rush the passer, then drop back into the strong side hook zone that the Sam linebacker would occupy on a normal Cover 3 play.

Strengths

By flipping the roles of the strong side end and strong side linebacker, there is a chance we can confuse either the offensive line, quarterback, or even both. The offensive line would be focused initially on blocking the defensive end, and the quarterback would perceive a hole in the coverage where the Sam linebacker would normally be.

This allows the Sam linebacker to attack an offensive line that has over extended itself needlessly and the defensive end to sneak back into a hook zone, which can be very tough for the quarterback to read correctly.

Weaknesses

By sending a defensive end back into a hook zone, we put a player whose main job is to rush the quarterback in a position where they have to zone up and pass coverage, something they aren't going to be very comfortable doing for the most part. Also, as with any fire zone, the varying responsibilities can get confusing occasionally, leading to blown coverages.

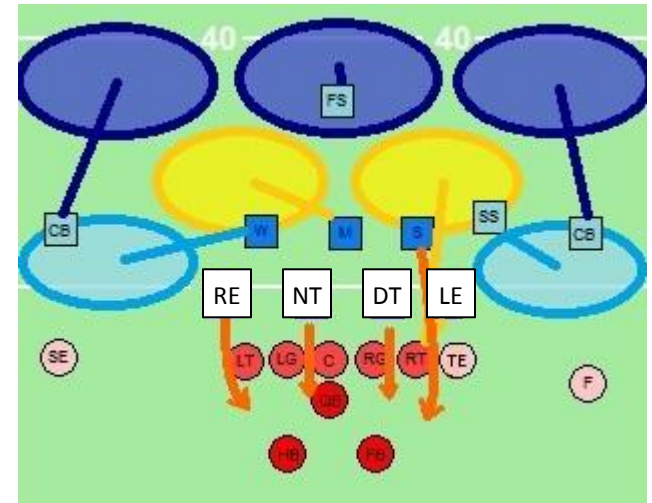


Figure 21: Sam Fire Zone.

Sam FIRE ZONE (continued)

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The weak side end, nose tackle and defensive tackle will all rush their normal gaps and try to sack the quarterback. The strong side end will step up momentarily as if he's about to rush, before dropping back and playing a hook zone on the strong side of the field.

Linebackers: The Will linebacker and Mike linebacker will be in zone coverage, with the Will linebacker taking the weak side flat and the Mike linebacker playing a weak side hook zone. The Sam linebacker however will use the strong side end's feint to blitz the 'C' gap and attack the quarterback.

Secondary: With the secondary playing a Cover 1 look, the corners will immediately drop back and play deep zones along with the free safety, with them each being responsible for a third of the field. The strong safety, starting off up near the line of scrimmage, will slide over and play the flat zone on the strong side of the field.

Mike FIRE ZONE

Play Design

The Mike Fire Zone is designed to create confusion in the middle of the field for the offense, with the Mike linebacker coming up the A gap and the nose tackle stepping up to engage before dropping back into a hook zone.

The defense will begin from a Cover 1 look, and the rest of the defenders will maintain their regular Cover 3 defense responsibilities.

Strengths

The offensive line will be ready to double team the nose tackle in many protection schemes, as the weak side guard and center protect the weak side A gap – which is what makes the Mike Fire Zone so effective.

The offensive line must initially protect both A gaps, leaving the rest of the defensive line in one on one matchups. Secondly, the quarterback is not going to be looking for the nose tackle to drop back into that middle hook zone, and may throw to what he thinks is an open point on the field without ever even seeing the nose tackle back there.

Weaknesses

As the biggest, strongest player on the field, the nose tackle will often be the slowest and least agile as well. This can make it very difficult for them to play in coverage for any extended period of time, which is why this play is best used to catch the defense off guard – you're putting essentially your weakest coverage player right smack in the middle of the field.

Also, it can be confusing for the defense remembering which player is filling in which part of the Cover 3 defense behind, leading occasionally to blown coverages.

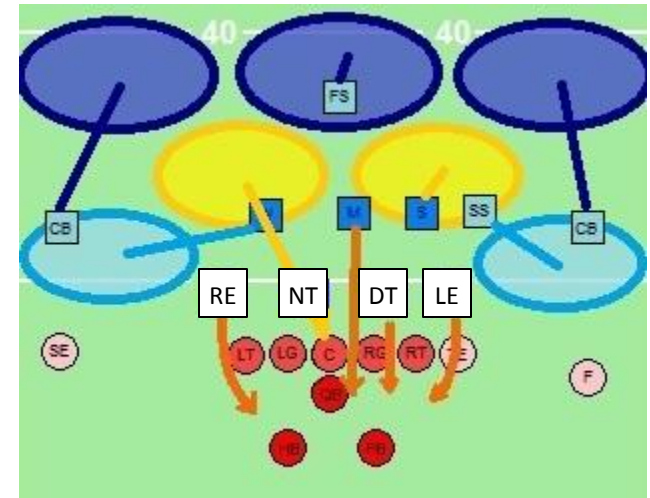


Figure 22: Mike Fire Zone.

Mike FIRE ZONE (continued)

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: Both defensive ends as well as the defensive tackle will have their normal responsibilities, rushing the quarterback from their normal gaps. The nose tackle however will step up as if he is about to engage the blocker, before dropping back into coverage and playing a weak side hook zone.

Linebackers: The Will linebacker will play a weak side flat zone, while the Sam linebacker plays a strong side hook zone. The Mike linebacker will blitz, right up the strong side 'A' gap, taking advantage of the momentary confusion created by the nose tackle's fake.

Secondary: The secondary, playing from a Cover 1 look, will drop back into Cover 3. The corners will both drop back and play deep zones on their respective thirds of the field, while the free safety plays the deep middle third, and the strong safety plays the strong side flat.

Suicide FIRE ZONE (continued)

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The weak side end and both tackles will rush the quarterback, while the strong side end fakes as if he's about to engage his blocker before dropping back and playing the strong side flat.

Linebackers: The linebackers will play their normal Cover 3 responsibilities here, with the Will linebacker taking the weak side flat, the Mike linebacker stepping up before dropping to a weak side hook zone, and the Sam linebacker playing the strong side hook zone.

Secondary: Beginning from a Cover 1 alignment, the corners and free safety will play the three deep zones of this Cover 3 look, each responsible for a third of the field. The strong safety however will blitz, coming off the edge and using the strong side end's misdirection to get into the backfield.

Freeky FIRE ZONE

Play Design

The Freeky Fire Zone, run from a Cover 1 look, is a play where we send the player both the farthest and least likely to attack the line on an edge blitz, with the closest defensive end – the weak side end in this case – out into the flat. The rest of the defense will play Cover 3, however a couple defenders will be in zones they wouldn't usually be in.

The strong safety will drop back and play the free safety's regular middle deep zone, and the linebackers will all slide over one in coverage. The Will linebacker will move from a weak side flat to the weak side hook zone, the Mike linebacker over to the strong side hook zone, and the Sam linebacker over to the strong side flat.

Strengths

This can be a very difficult play for the quarterback to read, as there are a lot of moving parts. And the one part of the field they will believe is initially open – the weak side flat, is in fact covered by a weak side defensive end, sneaking out into coverage after engaging long enough for the free safety to get around the edge.

The offensive line is rarely going to account for the free safety in their protection schemes, meaning its solely up to either a running back to make a big block or the quarterback to see him coming and get the ball out to his hot read.

Weaknesses

That potential confusion due to a large number of moving parts is a double edged sword, as its possible some of the defensive players may blow a coverage, with two guys headed to the same place on the field by accident.

There's also the fact that the defensive end, a player on the field for his ability to rush the passer, is being placed in a position where they are forced to play to their weakness.

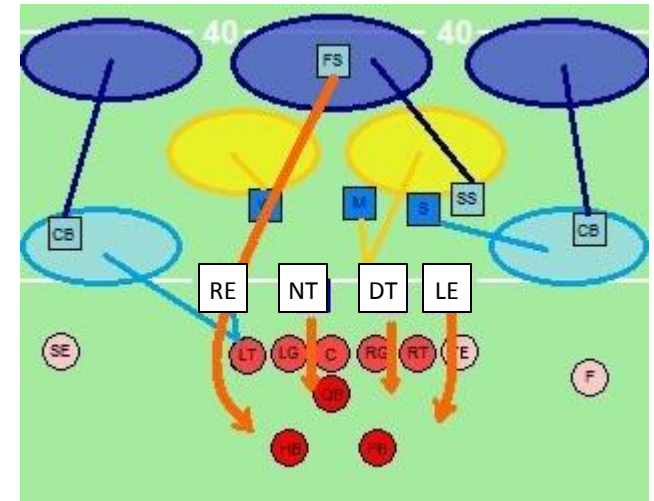


Figure 24: Freaky Fire Zone.

Freeky FIRE ZONE (continued)

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: Aside from the weak side end, the rest of the defensive line will play their regular gaps, looking to sack the quarterback. The weak side end will fake as if that is what he intends to do as well, before dropping back into coverage and playing the weak side flat.

Linebackers: All three linebackers will be in zone coverage, with the Will and Mike linebackers each playing hook zones – the Will linebacker on the weak side, and the Mike linebacker on the strong side. The Sam linebacker will slide outside, playing the flat zone normally occupied by the strong safety in this Cover 3 look.

Secondary: Lined up in a Cover 1 look to start, the free safety, playing the lone high safety, will begin to creep up towards the line on the first words out of the quarterback's mouth, with the strong safety doing just the opposite, moving back to replace the free safety. Once the ball is hiked, the free safety will blitz off the weak side edge, while weak side corner, strong safety, and strong side corner each play deep zones for left, middle, and right sides of the field, respectively.

Cover 2 Look FIRE ZONE

Play Design

The corner blitz can also be very effective as a fire zone as well. Starting from a Cover 2 look, on the first sound out of the quarterback's mouth, the blitzing corner – in this case the left corner, number 22 – will walk up the line of scrimmage next to the weak side defensive end.

At the same time, the free safety and strong safety will slide over to the left, and the right corner will drop back. On the snap of the ball, the corner will blitz, and the defense behind will drop into a Cover 3 defense, with the free safety, strong safety, and right corner playing deep. The weak side end will step up to engage the left tackle momentarily to give his blitzing teammate the advantage he needs, before dropping back and playing the flat zone on the weak side of the field.

Strengths

The corner blitz, with the combination of the speed with which they can get to the quarterback and the fact that most protection schemes can't account for the corner off the edge, is always potentially a devastating call for the offense.

When the defensive end does his job correctly, occupying the left tackle long enough, you get the positive of a free runner at the quarterback without leaving any holes in your coverage. And in the rare cases that a running back is able to deliver a chip block or a sliding protection scheme picks him up, the quarterback will be tempted to throw into the flat on the weak side, often without seeing the defensive end dropping back into coverage.

Weaknesses

If the quarterback sees the rolling coverage and the corner moving inside early, he may be able to change the call at the line to better attack the defense, which is why a combination of film study and practice is necessary to get the correct timing as to not tip your hand too early. Also, the defensive end is put in a tough position, as they are best suited to be rushing the quarterback off the edge – not playing coverage in the flats.

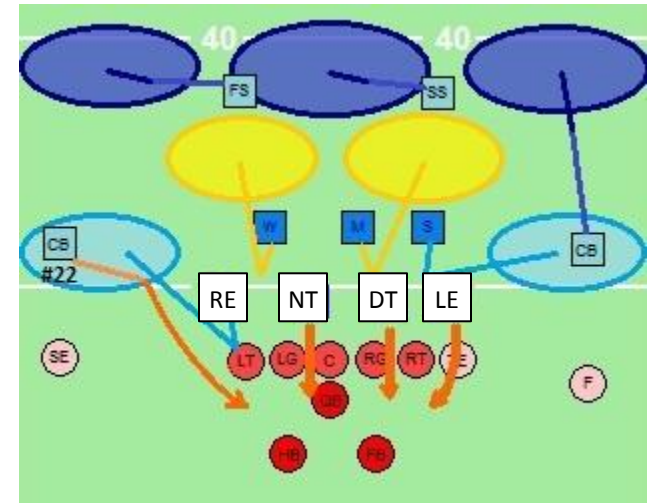


Figure 25: Cover 2 Look 22 Fire Zone.

Cover 2 Look FIRE ZONE (continued)

Positional Responsibilities & Alignment

Defensive Line: The defensive tackles will play their normal gaps on this play, regardless of which corner is blitzing. The defensive ends however will have differing responsibilities based on which side the corner blitz is coming from. In this example, with the blitz coming from the corner positioned on the weak side, the weak side defensive end will be the one faking as if he's about to rush the passer, before quickly dropping back to play coverage in the weak side flat.

Linebackers: The Will, Mike, and Sam linebackers will all step up initially when the ball is snapped, before dropping back to their coverage responsibilities. The Will and Mike linebackers will patrol the middle, each playing hook zones in the middle of the field. The Sam linebacker will slide out, playing the flat on the strong side.

Secondary: This play will begin with the secondary lined up in a Cover 2 look, however when the quarterback begins to speak at the line of scrimmage, there will be quite a bit of pre-snap movement. The left corner will move up to the line of the scrimmage and inside, so as to be in a better position to blitz the quarterback. The rest of the secondary will roll over, to create a Cover 3. The free safety will slide over and take the left deep zone, the strong safety playing the middle deep zone, and the right corner will drop back to play the right side deep zone.

Recommended Resources

Thanks for checking out this playbook!

If you'd like to see all of these coverages and blitzes explained with step by step video instructions, coaching tips, and key defensive drills for 4-3 teams, you can upgrade your package by visiting the page below:

<http://www.football-tutorials.com/p/upgrade43>

More recommended resources:

Our complete set of playbooks → <http://www.football-tutorials.com/playbooks/>

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