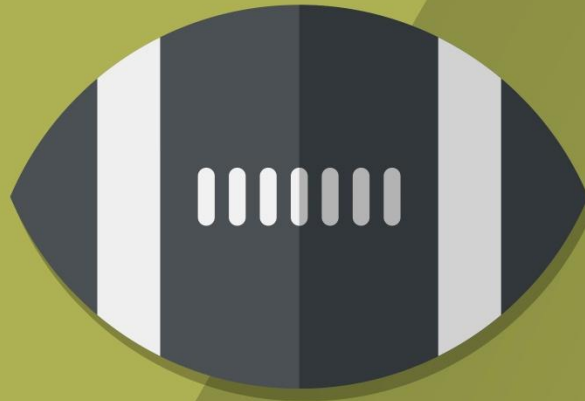




ESSENTIAL FOOTBALL PASS DEFENSE DRILLS

19

FUNDAMENTAL DRILLS
TO SHUT DOWN THE PASSING GAME

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INTRODUCTION

As passing offenses become more and more popular your team's ability to defend against the pass becomes more and more important.

In this mini-book, we have included 19 pass defense drills that will improve your players' coverage skills so that they are better able to shut down an opposing team's passing game.

To help you better understand each drill we have included the skill level of each drill (beginner, intermediate and advanced) as well as its purpose, what is needed to run it, how it works and the expected result of the drill.

We have also included coaching tips to help you get the most out of each of the drills that you choose to run.

Perform these drills regularly to improve your team's pass defense.

MAN COVER DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

Defensive backs learn how to play man coverage properly.

What you need:

Put three players together of similar skill and give them a football.

How this drill works:

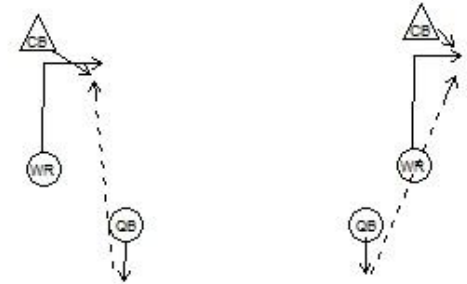
One player will start off as the quarterback and another player as the receiver. They will use one of the routes from the team passing tree against the defensive back. The defensive back has to try to cover the receiver so they cannot make the pass completion. Rotate the players each time a play is run.

Result:

Defenders learn to identify the different ways a player will run a pass route and how to defend it when they see it.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure players have the right backpedal, recognition of the route, and then break properly on the ball.
- Also reinforce to players that they cannot make contact with the receiver until they catch the ball.



Defenders learn how to play man-to-man coverage on the receiver.

BAT DOWN DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

Defenders learn to get in position on a throw to knock the ball out of the way.

What you need:

You will need to set up a tackling dummy at different areas of the field. Defensive backs should be lined up at the various dummies. The quarterback (or coach, if necessary), will throw the ball at the dummies.

How this drill works:

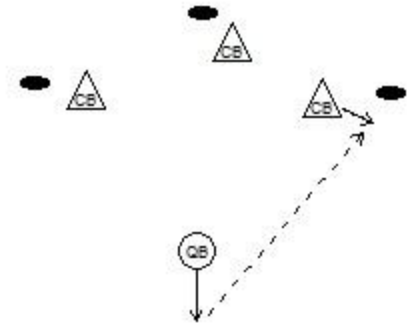
The defensive back's break to the ball will help them bat the ball down from the receiver, and that is what this drill works on. As the QB (or coach) drops back, he will survey the field and decide which dummy to throw the ball at. The defensive backs need to read where the quarterback is going to throw and then make an adjustment to get into position to knock the ball away.

Result:

Defensive backs develop their reaction skills and learn how to make more plays in the secondary.

Coaching Tips:

- Defensive backs must break towards the ball and attempt to knock it out of the way without making contact with the dummy (pass interference).



The defensive back breaks on the ball and knocks it down in this drill.

TIMING THE JUMP DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

Defensive backs learn to time their jump, which is important in defending and also for out dueling the receiver for the ball.

What you need:

Match up different defensive backs and wide receivers on each play. You can run this from two sides if you have two quarterbacks that need work.

How this drill works:

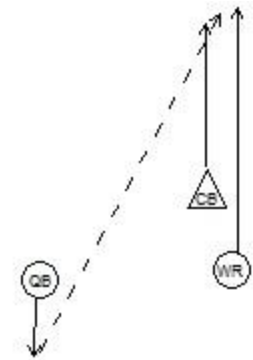
On the snap of the ball the wide receiver is going to run a fly pattern. The defensive back must try to stay with the receiver while there is no contact between the two of them. Once the ball is in the air, both players must wait for it to come down, and while it is in the air, they must time their jump to try and compete for the ball.

Result:

Both offensive and defensive players learn to time their jumps accordingly when the ball is in the air.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure defensive backs don't initiate contact with the receiver while the ball is in the air as during a game this could lead to a pass interference penalty.



Defensive backs develop good timing on jump balls in this drill.

THE SQUARE DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

Defensive backs learn proper footwork.

What you need:

Four pylons set up in a 15-yard by 15-yard square. The defensive backs can line up to begin at one pylon (all at the same pylon).

How this drill works:

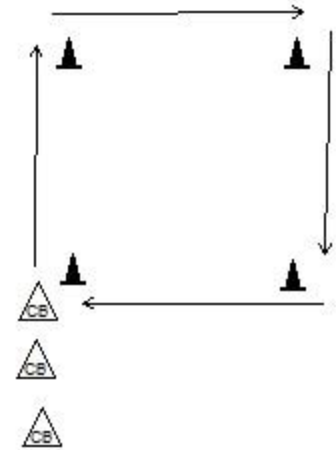
The DB starts at the first cone with his back toward the next cone. On the whistle, he will back peddle to the cone, then carioca to the next cone, then sprint forward to the next cone, and then he will shuffle to the final cone.

Result:

Defensive players improve their footwork.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch for proper footwork and the proper defensive crouch position. Players' shoulders should always remain parallel to the line of scrimmage
- Stop the drill if the players are getting lazy with their form.
- You can even have linebackers participate in this drill.



Defensive players practice their footwork in this drill.

BACK PEDAL AND CHANGE DIRECTION DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

Backpedaling is important for defensive players to get adequate coverage on pass plays, and to drop into zones.

What you need:

You just need a few lines of players in their respective positions (DB's, LB's and Safeties).

How this drill works:

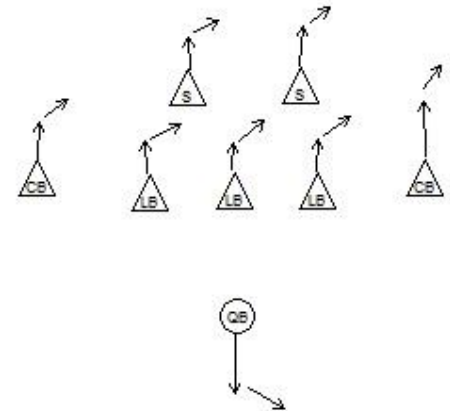
The coach – or a quarterback – will deliver the cadence and snap the ball. At this point, the coach (or QB) will drop back and so will the defensive players.

Result:

With work on the backpedal and the footwork, your DBs and LBs are going to reach their zones quicker, and not get burned by receivers.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch for the proper backpedal: quick steps backward, good balance with the center of gravity right over the shoes, the behind dropped a bit and the head up.
- The next stage of this drill is to add receivers or for the QB to move in the pocket.



Players perfect their backpedals in this drill.

JAM THE RECEIVER DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

In some defenses, it is important to break the timing of receivers and quarterbacks by jamming them at the line.

What you need:

At first, you can just have two lines of defensive backs and linebackers with coaches and tackling dummies until the players learn a good technique for the jam. Add real receivers once the jam is perfected.

How this drill works:

When the ball is snapped (or the play begins) the defensive back, instead of beginning a backpedal, will step forward like he is going to make a block, and engage the wide receiver.

Result:

Players learn to execute a good jam, which will cause havoc with a team that uses a lot of timed passing routes.

Coaching Tips:

- The idea at first should be for the defender to give a quick jam, under the shoulder pads at the chest, and then to get into his backpedal or to open the hips and start side sprinting with the receiver.



DB does a quick jam on the receiver and then gets into his backpedal or sprint.

JUMP TIMING DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Defensive backs work on going and getting the ball at its highest point.

What you need:

You can either run this drill against other defensive backs, or you can have the DBs work against receivers.

How this drill works:

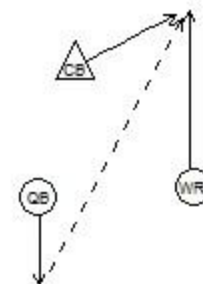
The coach or a QB can throw the ball up for grabs in this drill, but it essentially pits two players against one another in a jump ball situation. Often times the ball is just thrown up for a receiver to grab and the defender that can time his jump effectively can often break up the play.

Result:

Defensive backs develop better jump timing to intercept passes and defense more passes that come their way.

Coaching Tips:

- DBs should work on seeing the ball in the air, and watching the trajectory – essentially figuring out where it is going to go. Then they need to make sure when the ball is at a particular height, they are able to plant and jump up to knock the ball away, or intercept it.



Defensive backs work on making the interception or batting the ball away in a jump ball situation with a receiver.

MIRROR DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Part of being a good defensive back is to be able to follow the receiver that you are covering – essentially mirroring them.

What you need:

Put a defensive back and a wide receiver together.

How this drill works:

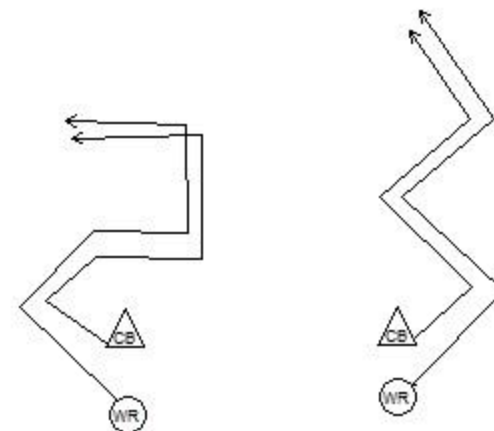
On the snap of the ball, the defensive back will try to mirror all of the movements of the wide receiver. When a receiver takes off on a fly pattern, so does the cornerback. If the receiver stops, the cornerback has to stop immediately as well.

Result:

This drill builds better man-to-man skills for the defensive backs.

Coaching Tips:

- The idea of this drill is to get the defensive back to be able to react immediately to what the receiver is going to do.



Defensive backs mirror the receivers they are covering.

JAM AND RUN DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Players learn to disrupting a TE or Slot receiver's timing on a passing play by jamming a player on the line, inside the 5-yard area.

What you need:

You can run two or more stations of this, just to get repetitions for the linebackers and the safeties.

How this drill works:

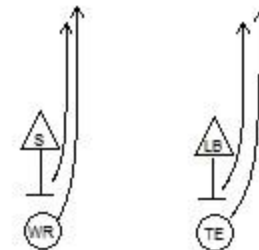
In this drill, the linebacker or safety will step up and jam the TE or receiver on the snap of the ball. The LB or safety must release any contact if the receiver gets by the 5 yard mark – at which point they must cover the receiver.

Result:

Defender learns to create an effective jam on the line, and then continue to cover their man down the field.

Coaching Tips:

- At first, have the receivers play along while the LBs get the right technique, and they don't get caught out of position. Gradually build up to full speed drills.
- To go one step further, you can make the LB or safety continue the coverage downfield for a pass play.



Safeties and linebackers work on jamming a receiver at the line of scrimmage.

FOLLOW THE QB DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Defensive backs learn to shadow the direction of a QB's pivot and read the quarterback better during pass plays.

What you need:

You should field a back seven(8) (3 or 4 LB's and 4 DB's), and they should start out in their regular positions.

How this drill works:

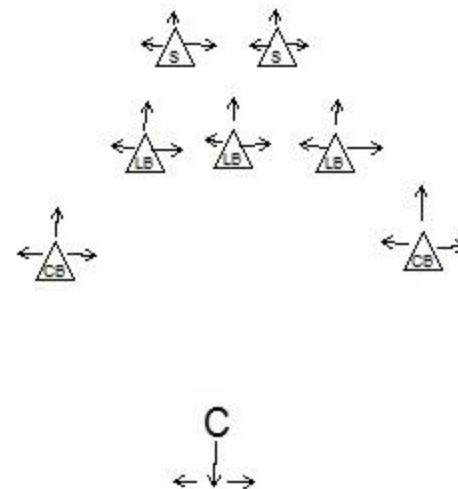
When the coach 'snaps' the ball, the defensive players will immediately backpedal into their zone pass defense position. From here, the coach (QB) will raise the ball up, like a quarterback, and pivot to aim the shoulders in a certain direction. The defensive players then react to the direction the QB is pivoted. If the QB turns his shoulders to the right, the defensive players shuffle to their left. If the QB is straight ahead, then they go back to their original zones, to the left, then the defensive players go to their right.

Result:

Improved zone coverage as defenders learn to react as the quarterback shifts the direction of his body.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch that defensive backs and linebackers are getting into the habit of following the quarterback's eyes while not leaving their zone.



Players learn to react to the quarterback.

ZONE RECOGNITION DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Defensive backs and linebackers learn to help their defensive teammates by calling out where they see the receiver in their area going.

What you need:

The defenders should line up in a skeleton defense, and only one receiver and one quarterback will work on each given play.

How this drill works:

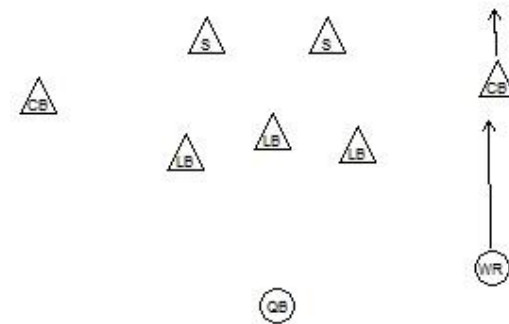
Upon the snap of the ball, the receiver will jog downfield, while the defensive back is in a full backpedal, 20 yards from the line of scrimmage. The purpose of this drill is for the defensive back to alert his teammates where he believes the receiver is going to run his pattern. When the receiver is between the line of scrimmage and 6 yards, he calls out short. Once the receiver hits the 7-yard to 12-yard area, the DB or LB calls out 'medium'. And once the receiver is past the 12-yard mark, then the DB or LB calls out 'deep'.

Result:

Defensive players recognize the different zone areas and begin to work as a more cohesive unit in the secondary.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure the defensive player is loud enough in his calls for all his teammates to hear.



The cornerback alerts his teammates to where he thinks the receiver is going.

ZONE DISCIPLINE DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Players practice maintaining tight and effective zone coverage.

What you need:

Have defensive backs (and linebackers, if you want) line up in their starting defensive positions.

How this drill works:

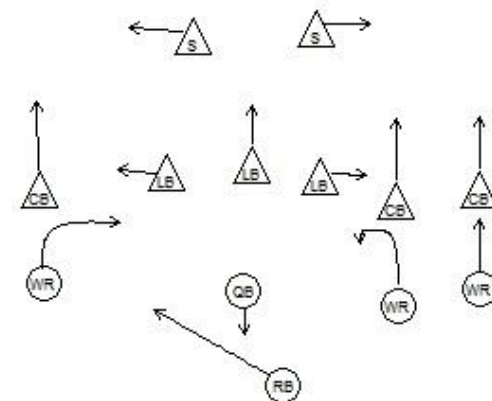
On the snap of the ball, the defensive players will drop into their zones. Then a group of receivers and/or running backs will run patterns through the zone.

Result:

With regular practice, your defensive backs will continue to gain discipline and stay within a tight zone. This will make your pass defense a little tighter and less likely to be beaten.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure defensive backs are not following the receivers going through their zone, unless they believe the ball is going to be thrown. If a zone defense is stretched, holes open up for a team to pass to – that is why zone discipline is important.



In this drill, defensive players work on maintaining good zone discipline.

JAM ON THE LINE DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

The jam is a play designed to disrupt the timing of a passing play on offense.

What you need:

Line up defensive backs and wide receivers against each other. You can run two sides if you have QB's that need the work.

How this drill works:

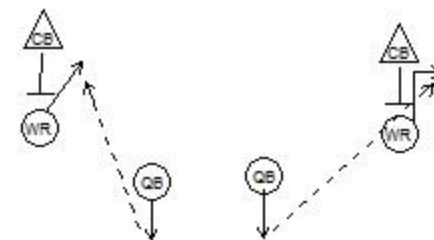
Contact between receivers and defensive backs is allowed within 5 yards of the line of scrimmage. That's what this drill is going to do – teach defensive backs to execute a good jam, and for receivers to fight it off.

Result:

Defensive backs learn to jam the receiver at the line and prevent him from getting into his route right away.

Coaching Tips:

- Receivers should attempt to maintain their routes, while the defensive backs should do their best to disrupt the timing of the play. QBs have 5 seconds to release the ball.



Defensive backs work on their jams within five yards of the line of scrimmage.

DROP ZONE DRILL

Level:

Advanced

Purpose:

Learning to drop into the proper zone, and having discipline to stay in the zone is an important element of the defensive coverage.

What you need:

To run this drill, you should have your defensive backs line up as though they were in their regular position to start the play.

How this drill works:

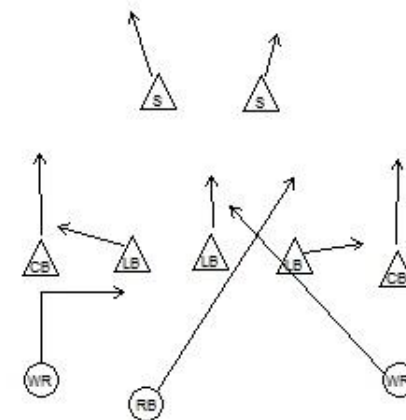
On the snap of the ball, the defensive players will drop into the zone that they are going to cover. Once you have that part covered, you can add in wide receivers, and / or running backs to simulate game play in these situations. Another element you can add are the linebackers, who will also play an important role in a zone defense.

Result:

Your defensive backs gain a better understanding of a zone defense and their responsibility within it.

Coaching Tips:

- Your defensive backs must have the knowledge of where they drop to, and the discipline to cover the zone and not follow the men across the field, abandoning their zone.



In this drill, defenders learn to get into their zone defense and then maintain discipline as the offense runs its play.

BETWEEN THE CONES DRILL

Level:

Advanced

Purpose:

Players practice defending passes.

What you need:

You need two cones that are about 5 yards apart, and two lines on either side of the cones, about 5 yards from the edge of each cone. One will be the receiving line and the other will be the distraction line.

How this drill works:

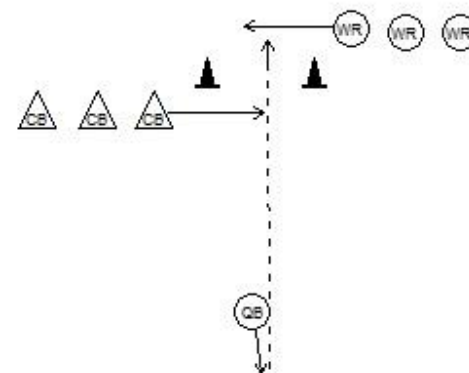
At the snap of the ball, the quarterback will drop back, and the players on each side will run half-speed toward each other, but on opposite sides of the cones. The quarterback will need to drop back and make the pass to the receiver in between the cones. The defender will try to get in the way of the pass (but not deflect it).

Result:

Passing in a certain area is crucial because often QB's only have a limited window in order to get a pass in.

Coaching Tips:

- Having defenders involved in this drill will allow them to get valuable practice defending and will make it even more crucial for the QB to be accurate and for the timing of the play to be bang on.



Defenders and receivers converge in this drill which gives defensive backs valuable time defending passes.

PROGRESSION WITH DEFENDERS DRILL

Level:

Advanced

Purpose:

Adding defenders takes the degree of difficulty for the QB to the next level while giving defenders a better understanding of what offenses are trying to do against them.

What you need:

Line up the skeleton offense against matching defensive backs. Add in a safety or middle linebacker to cover the receiver out of the backfield.

How this drill works:

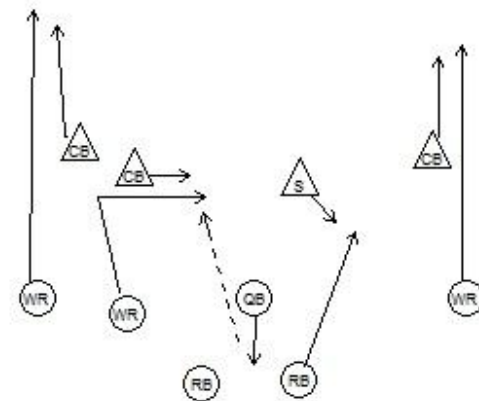
When the QB drops back, the defense will be in one of their defensive coverages. The QB needs to read what the defense is doing while going through his progressions. This will help him make the best decision on the field. This should all be done within 3 seconds of setting at the end of his drop.

Result:

Adding defenders forces the QB to know exactly where his players are going, move through his reads and then make the correct pass.

Coaching Tips:

- Sometimes the play is already scripted and it has to go to a particular player, in this case, the QB should look at that player first, and then go to a secondary target if necessary.



Adding defenders to this drill makes it more difficult for the QB to go through his progression.

DOUBLE MOVE DEFEND DRILL

Level:

Advanced

Purpose:

Helps prevent defensive backs from getting burned by a double move.

What you need:

A line up of receivers and defenders along with a quarterback.

How this drill works:

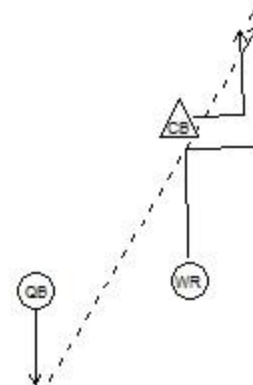
The receiver runs out about 7 yards, does an out pattern, but then turns it up field. Many cornerbacks can get sucked in by the out, hoping to get a good, clean break on the ball to either intercept it, or to try and make a quick tackle. This can create problems, as the defender commits to the pass and the receiver turns his route upfield and right by the defender. So, the defender needs to watch the quarterback out of the corner of his eye – to see if the shoulders are aimed his way, if he has both hands on the ball, and if the QB takes a step forward.

Result:

Once a defender knows what to expect from a wide receiver and the QB, he will have greater success against a double move.

Coaching Tips:

- The QB should attempt to throw the out pass occasionally, but then try the deep ball. The defenders need to learn to be patient, and that a short 6 or 7 yard gain is much more appealing than a long touchdown pass over their heads.



Players learn to avoid getting burned by a double move.

TIP DRILL

Level:

Advanced

Purpose:

Players develop concentration and reaction skills.

What you need:

A coach to throw the ball and a single file line with the appropriate players to catch the ball.

How this drill works:

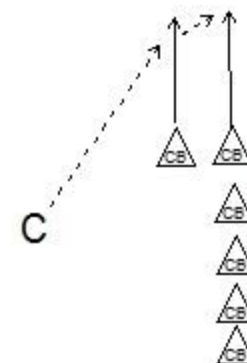
The first person in the line will be the tipper and the next in line will be the catcher. The coach will toss the ball and it is the tippers job, not to knock down, but to tip or deflect or to distract the player catching the ball. The receiver tries to catch the ball regardless of what the tipper does.

Result:

Players learn to have better concentration during tipped balls, which is something that happens often at all levels of football.

Coaching Tips:

- Once a pair finishes, have the receiver go to the tip position and the person behind him be the catcher.



Players practice maintaining concentration and catching tipped balls in this fun drill.

DEFENDER PASS RECOGNITION DRILL

Level:

Advanced

Purpose:

Understanding the kinds of pass patterns that are coming is a good drill to learn for linebackers and defensive backs.

What you need:

You can run this as a skeleton drill – linebackers and defensive backs on defense, and a QB, 2 RB, 2 WR, and 1 TE.

How this drill works:

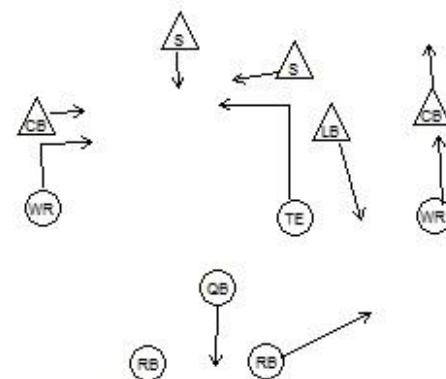
On each snap, the defense should get into their coverage, and then they need to call out Pass, and if they can identify the route the offense is going to run (screen, hook, post, etc), they should.

Result:

Pass recognition will help all of the players in the secondary area.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure defenders are reading and recognizing what is going to happen on a play and then getting into better position to make the play.



Defenders learn to recognize what pass patterns the offense is running in this informative drill.

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