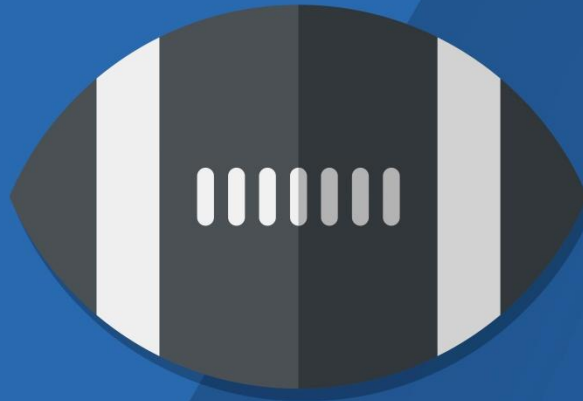




ESSENTIAL FOOTBALL RUNNING GAME DRILLS

18

FUNDAMENTAL DRILLS
FOR AN UNSTOPPABLE RUNNING GAME

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INTRODUCTION

In youth football in particular, a good running attack can win a lot of football games.

In this mini-book, we have included 18 running game drills that will improve your running backs' play and allow your offense to rip off big gain after big gain.

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.

Start performing these drills consistently and watch your team's ground game become an unstoppable force!

HOLE NUMBERS DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

Teaches players the hole numbers. Knowing these numbers is essential for success in the running game.

What you need:

You can line up an entire offense so everyone knows where the different holes are in relation to the position.

How this drill works:

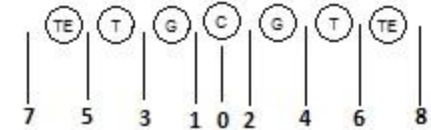
At first, this drill is nothing more than explaining the holes in an offensive line, and then possibly explaining to kids what it means when a certain play is called. This will likely be their first introduction to this concept, so it is best to take it slow.

Result:

Players learn the holes so that they will know where to run or block when a play is called.

Coaching Tips:

- This drill will require a great deal of repetition to begin.
- If you have to, you can use numbered markers, or even use numbers cones to denote the different holes.



The diagram above shows the common hole numbers.

JUKE, SPIN, STIFF ARM DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

Running backs learn three basic moves that they can use to gain extra yards.

What you need:

Three dummies in a single file line held by coaches or by other players waiting their turn in this drill. A line of running backs to go through the drill.

How this drill works:

On the snap of the ball, the running back will receive a handoff (or have the ball already) and at the first dummy, the runner will make a juke around the dummy then sprint to the next dummy. At the next dummy, the runner will drop the inside shoulder on the path they take and then spin off the dummy and head to the next one. At this one the running back will decide which side to run to – left or right – and they will change the side they are carrying the ball on and then stiff arm with the other.

Result:

Backs learn how to employ each of these moves as ways to maximize their yards carrying the ball.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch that backs are using good running technique between dummies and that they have the ball tucked away properly.



Running backs practice their juke, spin and stiff arm moves in this fast-paced drill.

ONE CUT DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

Teaches running backs how to get upfield.

What you need:

Set up pylons where the different running holes should be. Have a running back in the backfield and a shadow linebacker on the defensive side.

How this drill works:

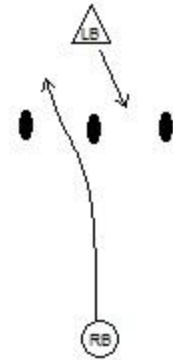
Running backs get one upfield cut and then they have to accelerate forward in this drill.

Result:

Runners learn to take the openings that they have and make positive yardage instead of trying too hard to make something happen and not gaining the yards they need.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure running backs are making a quick read and accelerating through the hole. Too many RB's will try to juke and jive to avoid tackles instead of taking the opening and accelerating through it.



In this drill, running backs learn to make a quick read and cut with no juking or jiving.

THE EXCHANGE DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

Running backs and quarterbacks work on making good exchanges.

What you need:

You will need a QB and RB in order to do this drill. The RB should take up his normal position behind the quarterback.

How this drill works:

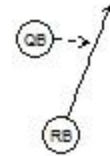
Upon the snap of the ball, the running back should head towards his hole in the imaginary offensive line, and the QB should go there to meet him. This is the basic format of most running plays. The QB will hand the ball to the running back so he can go through the hole.

Result:

Timing is improved between the QB and RB, reducing the chances of a fumble occurring between them during a game.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch for the proper reception by the running back and make sure that each exchange is seamless.



Good exchanges between the QB and the RB are essential for a good running game. Players practice those exchanges in this drill.

CUT AND SWITCH DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

Players learn to carry the ball in the proper arm.

What you need:

Set up a cone course with the cones about 5 yards apart, and staggered down a 10-yard section of the field. Each player will need a football as they negotiate the course.

How this drill works:

As each player runs through the course, they need to run outside of each cone, and zig zag (cut) from cone to cone. As they are going down the course, the ball carrier needs to switch the ball back and forth between arms to keep the ball in the outside arm as they go around the cone.

Result:

Learning to keep the ball to the outside reduces the number of fumbles caused by defender hits.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch for proper transfer of the ball from arm to arm.



Players learn to transfer the ball from arm to arm.

RUN THE GAUNTLET DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

Backs learn to protect the ball and avoid making fumbles.

What you need:

Many football organizations have an apparatus that players can run through that offers resistance and it also affects the player's ability to hang on to the ball. Or, you can have a column of players that runners will go through.

How this drill works:

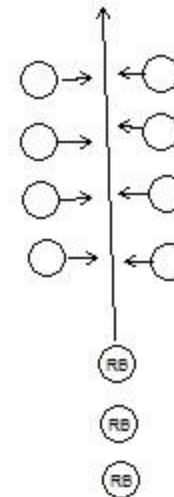
Whether you are using the apparatus or the column, ball carriers must run through the area and protect the ball from being knocked out of their grasp.

Result:

Each player learns better ball control.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch that players use both arms to protect the ball when going through the gauntlet.



Running backs learn to protect the football in the gauntlet drill.

CATCH, TUCK AND TAP DRILL

Level:

Beginner

Purpose:

A good-habit forming drill that teaches players to catch the ball and quickly tuck it away properly.

What you need:

Two lines of players throwing the ball back and forth.

How this drill works:

The player will catch the ball, tuck it down into a carrying position, and then when it is secured, the player will tap the top of the ball.

Result:

Players get used to catching the ball, securing it and then tapping it so they know it is secure.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch for consistent catching, tucking and tapping. Don't let players approach this process lackadaisically as ball security is vitally important.



Players pass the ball back and forth and practice catching it, tucking it and tapping it.

HOLD THE BALL DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Players practice holding onto the ball upon contact and staying on their feet.

What you need:

You need to have 5 players holding blocking dummies (held in the hands) or they can go without.

How this drill works:

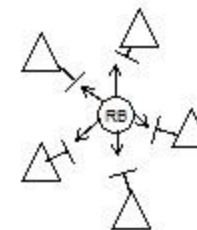
On the coaches' whistle, the player will run towards one of the defenders, absorb a 'pop' hit, then go right across to the other side for another pop hit, then down and across for another, etc. The drill does not end for the ball carrier until they hit all five players that are standing around them. If they lose the ball, they will start again. If they get knocked down, they must get up and continue on with the last player that knocked them down.

Result:

Ball carriers learn to protect the ball and absorb the hit but not fall. They also start to learn the advantage of initiating contact rather than just taking it.

Coaching Tips:

- Instruct defenders not to tackle the ball carrier. They must simply hit them hard enough to knock the player around and possibly to the ground. This isn't a tackling drill for the defenders as much as it is a drill for the ball carriers to learn to absorb punishment.



In this drill, running backs learn to absorb punishment and hold onto the ball.

RUNNING BACK READ DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Running backs learn to read their blocking and make cuts quickly to take advantage of openings.

What you need:

You can set up four coaches or four players with tackling dummies.

How this drill works:

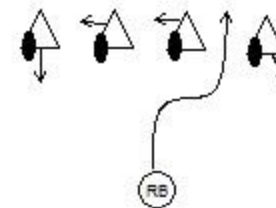
Running back starts off in normal position. Coach is the quarterback and calls a certain play (off tackle, inside guard dive, etc). On the snap of the ball, the coach hands off the ball as if it were a regular play. The players with the dummies shuffle one way or another, and they can do so at a different pace (some fast, some slow). Once the running back gets the ball, he must make a decision to move upfield very quickly. This requires him to make a split second judgment on which hole to take.

Result:

Running backs learn to anticipate and then cut upfield where there are holes in the line.

Coaching Tips:

- If the RB runs into a dummy, or bumps into one, he made an unwise choice. The aim of this drill is for the RB to quickly cut through a hole untouched.



Running backs learn to spot the open hole no matter where the play was originally designed to go.

GOAL LINE DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Running backs learn to find their way through all the traffic at the goal line.

What you need:

You will need standing tackling dummies, 5 players, a coach and 3 hand shields (hand dummies).

How this drill works:

The running back goes through the first set of obstacles (the tackling dummies set up as a diamond, with a coach behind the middle one). RB goes opposite way of coach. RB goes through two ball strippers. Then high steps over hand shields which are thrown at his feet by next two players. Finally, the last person has a hand shield and tries to shove, bump and drive the RB to the ground.

Result:

Running backs learn how to fight through traffic.

Coaching Tips:

- The RB must get over the goal line in order to win this drill!



Running backs learn how to negotiate their way through traffic.

CUTBACK DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Running backs learn how to find the cutback lane when the outside looks stuffed.

What you need:

Set up a small area for running backs to work that has pylons and the quarterback.

How this drill works:

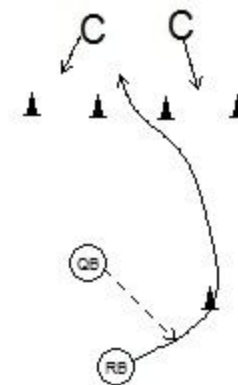
The QB tosses the ball to the RB on a sweep play; then the RB, once reaching the first cone, must decide which lane to cut into. The cut should be quick and decisive and the runner must get upfield.

Result:

RBs increase their ability to find holes in order to get up field to gain valuable yards.

Coaching Tips:

- A coach can be standing in different cutback lanes in order to prevent the runner from going into those lanes.



Running backs learn to spot cutback lanes in this drill.

BALL SWITCH WITH TACKLER DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Teaches running backs to keep the ball in the correct hand when confronting a tackler.

What you need:

Have the running back and the linebacker each start 10 yards directly apart from each other. Set up two cones 7 yards laterally to each side of where the center would snap the ball.

How this drill works:

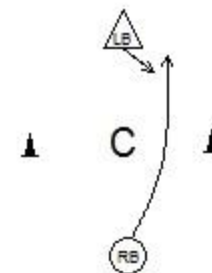
The coach stands in the center, where the center would be. He faces the running back with his back to the linebacker to indicate a direction the play will go. On the snap of the ball, the running back goes in the indicated direction and holds the ball on the proper side. The linebacker will meet the ball carrier and try to pry the ball loose.

Result:

RB learns to keep the ball in the outside arm, and change it if the defender switches the side he is on.

Coaching Tips:

- If the RB goes to the right side, then he should hold the ball away from the defender in the right arm. If he goes to the left, it should be in the left arm.



It's important that ball carriers learn to carry the ball with their outside arm away from the defender. This drill stresses that skill.

SEE THE BLITZ DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Running backs learn to see and pick up the blitz.

What you need:

Set up an offensive line, and on the other side of the ball line up just the linebackers.

How this drill works:

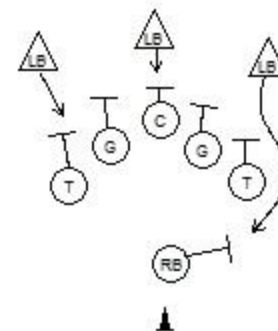
On the snap of the ball, the offensive line will simulate pass blocking and they will stop only two of three linebackers. The running back will not know which one they are going to let through. The running back must scan the interior of the line from center to tackle on both sides, and then identify where the blitzing linebacker is coming through. Then he must get in position quickly to stop the blitzing linebacker from getting to the pylon in the backfield (QB).

Result:

RBs learn to identify the blitz much quicker and then get in proper position to make a quality block.

Coaching Tips:

- The RB must get good position and have a strong base to stop the LB, otherwise the LB will run right over him. Also, the RB, must not put his head down to make a block, because most LB's will just fake and go around him to the pylon.



This drill teaches running backs how to identify and pick up the blitz.

HIDE AND SEEK DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Pits running backs against linebackers in “game-like” action.

What you need:

A line of running backs on one side, and a line of linebackers on the other. Two of the biggest tackling dummies will be in between them. The groups should be about 10 yards apart. Pylons will show the area where the players start.

How this drill works:

The linebackers start at one cone and the RBs start at the other. They should be about 10 yards apart, with the tackling dummies in the middle, laying on the ground. On the whistle, the RB will run forward, and then make a cut one way or the other. The linebacker will chop step, reading the play and then reacting with a forward scrape and then they need to run downhill towards the runner – in order to get their head across and in front of the runner to stop them.

Result:

Running backs improve their read and react skills.

Coaching Tips:

- Linebackers and running backs should not take a drop step, as they lose reaction time when this happens, allowing the competition to gain an advantage.



Running backs take on linebackers in this competitive drill.

SIDELINE RUNNING DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

Running backs learn how to gain a few extra yards down the sideline without getting pushed out.

What you need:

Set up a line of runners, and then set up three defenders staggered down the field.

How this drill works:

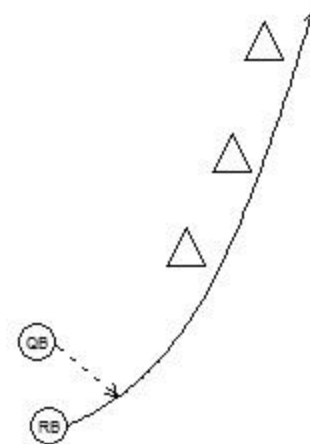
This drill starts with the quarterback tossing the ball to the receiver or running back on the left (or on the right for balance), and then the ball carrier moving upfield. There are three defenders, and the ball carrier must meet each of the three defenders. The carrier initiates contact and the defender simply 'pops' the ball carrier – and does NOT tackle them. This simulates the potential contact from defensive players as the ball carrier turns the corner and runs the sidelines.

Result:

Ball carriers get practice initiating contact, but also in absorbing and bouncing off of hits that shouldn't impede their forward progress on the field.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch that the running backs hold the ball in the correct arm and with the correct grip.



Running backs who learn to run along the sideline can produce valuable extra yards for your offense.

OKLAHOMA DRILL

Level:

Intermediate

Purpose:

A hard-hitting drill pitting running backs against linebackers.

What you need:

Cordon off an area that is about 15 yards long and about 7 yards wide. You will have two running backs and two linebackers for this drill. They will line up one behind the other.

How this drill works:

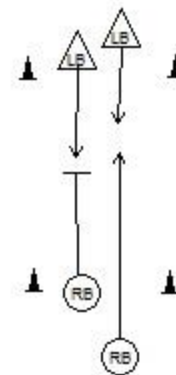
On the snap of the ball, the running back with the ball tries to cross the 15-yard mark without being tackled. The fullback, or blocking back, must take on the initial block, (or both) and create an opening for the running back. It is the responsibility of the linebackers to prevent the running backs from breaching the 15-yard mark of this particular drill. The front linebacker takes on the block and the rear linebacker takes on the runner.

Result:

The running backs learn to block to open a few holes, and the linebackers learn to shed blocks, take on blocks and make tackles.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch for good fundamentals from both sides. This can be a very competitive drill and you don't want players losing their composure and forgetting to play sound football.



Looking to up the energy in practice?
This drill pits running backs against linebackers in a very competitive atmosphere.

PIT DRILL

Level:

Advanced

Purpose:

In this drill, running backs match up against the defensive front seven.

What you need:

You need to create a 'pit' area, with tackling dummies lining both sides, and the players in the participating positions gathered around to create the pit.

How this drill works:

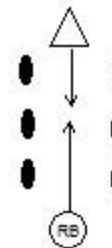
When the coach blows the whistle, the pit begins and the running back (or any ball carrier) must go within the area of the tackling dummies and either drive over the linebacker or defensive lineman, or juke and jive their way through. Linebackers and linemen must take the ball carrier down, and not let them get by.

Result:

Builds a competitive edge in your players.

Coaching Tips:

- This is head to head football, and there can be teeth rattling hits. Make sure players use good fundamentals and nobody gets "out of control."



Another high energy drill that is great for building the competitive spirit of your football team.

HALF SIDE DRILL

Level:

Advanced

Purpose:

Improves blocking and tackling.

What you need:

This is primarily a drill for running plays so the only players you will need are the center, guard, tackle, QB and 1 RB for this drill – and a DT, a DE and one linebacker.

How this drill works:

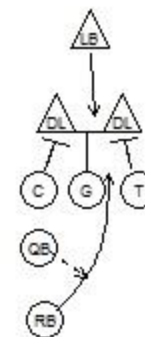
The coach will stand behind the defense and show the offense which hole they are going to run the ball to. The offense will approach the line of scrimmage and run the play. On offense, the object is to execute each block, and to seal the linebacker for the runner to make it through the line unscathed. The defense needs to fight against the block, and the linebacker has to shed or avoid the block and make the tackle.

Result:

Aside from the healthy competition, this is a great blocking and tackling drill that simulates game situations.

Coaching Tips:

- Give the offense one point for the RB making it through the line, and give the defense a point for a tackle within 5 yards and 2 points for a tackle behind the line of scrimmage.



Running back looks to find the hole and head upfield in the half side drill.

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