



PRINT n' GO

FOOTBALL

PRACTICE PLANS

DEFENSIVE SKILL DEVELOPMENT

**19 Skill-Building Drills To
Shut Down Your Opponents**



**Includes 5
Printable Practice
Plans**

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INTRODUCTION

Hello, and welcome to Print n' Go Football Practice Plans – Defensive Skills Edition!

There is no doubt that running a football practice is one of the most difficult undertakings in all of youth sports – and that's especially true when it comes to running a defense.

The offense gets the glory, but anyone who has ever coached or played defense knows that there is a different attitude required to play on that side of the ball. But there is a huge variety of skills necessary for a defense to be successful – tackling, trench play, coverage – and it can be very difficult to get everyone the reps they need to develop into effective football players. But there is a solution! Station based practices allows a coach the flexibility to install several drill stations and have players rotate through each station after a set amount of time. You break the team down into small groups, and assign each group a station, rotating them through to the next station once the clock runs out.

This maximizes both your space and your time – instead of having your DBs stand around and watch while the defensive line works on pass rush moves, they will be busy working on their ballhawking instincts, all while your LBs are working form tackling. This means more reps, which means more effective practice time, which at the end of the day, means more Ws!

One of the other advantages of the station based practice is that it allows you to make better use of parents and other assistants offering to help. Instead of just standing around watching or complaining, you can assign them a station and they can get involved and really feel like they are part of the process.

Lastly, and especially at a younger age, it's important for players to work on skills for other position groups as well. Just because a kid is defensive lineman now, that doesn't mean he won't be a linebacker or even a tight end when it's all said and done – so give players all the tools you can so that they can succeed in any situation.

We've included 19 drills and 5 pre-designed practice plans – including workouts designed for defensive linemen, one designed for linebackers, and a third for the whole defense!

Now... time to get started!

LEVELS OF CONTACT

At the top of each page, you will notice one of the 5 icons below. They each designate a different level of contact for that specific drill.

By designating each drill a specific level of contact, coaches are able to plan practices in advance and ensure players spend the right amount of time in pads.

USA Football recommends no more than 30 minutes per practice of full contact, and no more than 90 minutes per week during the season, while during the preseason 120 minutes per week is acceptable.



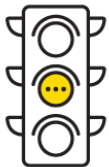
Air. Intensity: 1

Drill is run unopposed and without contact



Bag. Intensity: 2

Drill is run against a bag or soft-contact surface



Control. Intensity: 3

Drill is run at an assigned speed until the moment of contact with one player as the predetermined winner. Contact is above the waist, and players stay on their feet



Thud. Intensity: 4

Drill is run at competitive speed through the moment of contact. There is no predetermined winner. Contact is above the waist, players stay on their feet, and a quick whistle ends the drill



Live. Intensity: 4

Drill is run in game-like conditions. This is the only time players are taken to the ground.

DYNAMIC WARMUP

Complete each exercise for 2 sets of 10-20 yards



High Knee Run



Buttkicker Run



Frankenstein Walk



Walking Lunge & Twist



Walking Knee Hug



Straight Leg Run

LB AGILITY DRILL

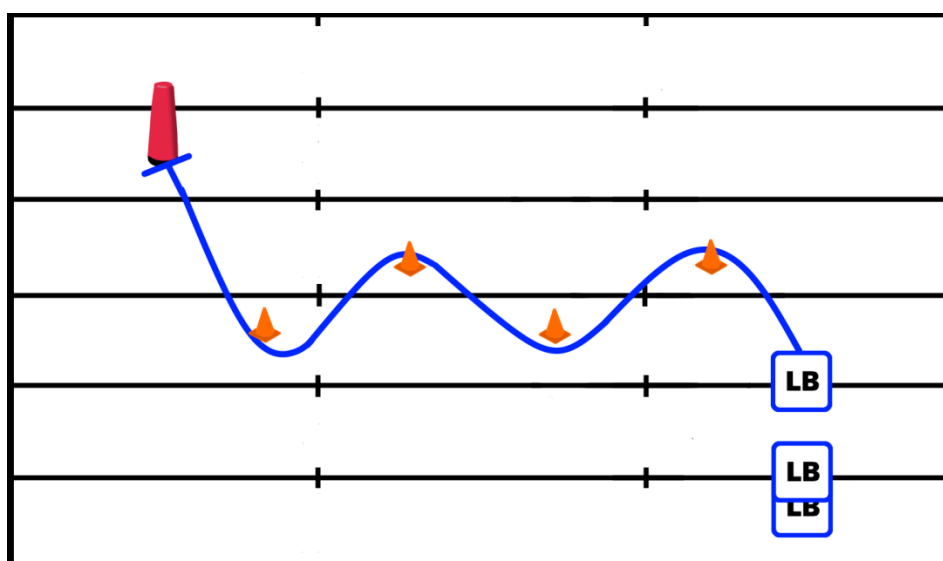


PURPOSE:

To get players loose and work on agility, acceleration, and tackling technique.

SETUP:

Setup 4 cones in a zig zag pattern, roughly 5 yards apart, with a tackling dummy 7 yards from the last cone. The players will form a line at one end 3-4 yards from the 1st cone.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. On the coach's signal, the 1st player in line will sprint to the first cone, and then backpedal to the 2nd.
2. The player will alternate, sprinting and backpedaling from cone to cone, and finishing with a form tackle on the dummy.

COACH'S CORNER

- You can alternate, adding in a sideways shuffle both inside and outside instead of the sprint and backpedal.

RUN & ROLL

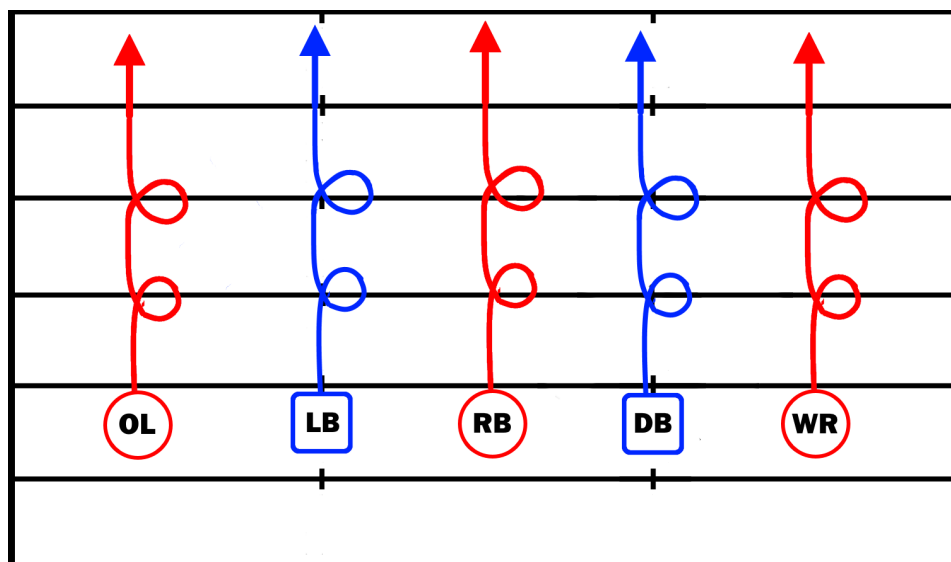


PURPOSE:

To get players loose while working on coordination, agility, and hustle.

SETUP:

Have the players line up and spread out on the goal line.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. On the coach's signal, the players will sprint forward.
2. Once they've gone 5 yards, they will roll forward, get up on their feet, and keep running.
3. They will do the same 5 yards downfield, then get up and sprint 10 yards downfield hard to finish the drill.

COACH'S CORNER

- You can run the same drill with backpedals and a backward roll, or even a sideways shuffle with a barrel roll.

RING DRILLS



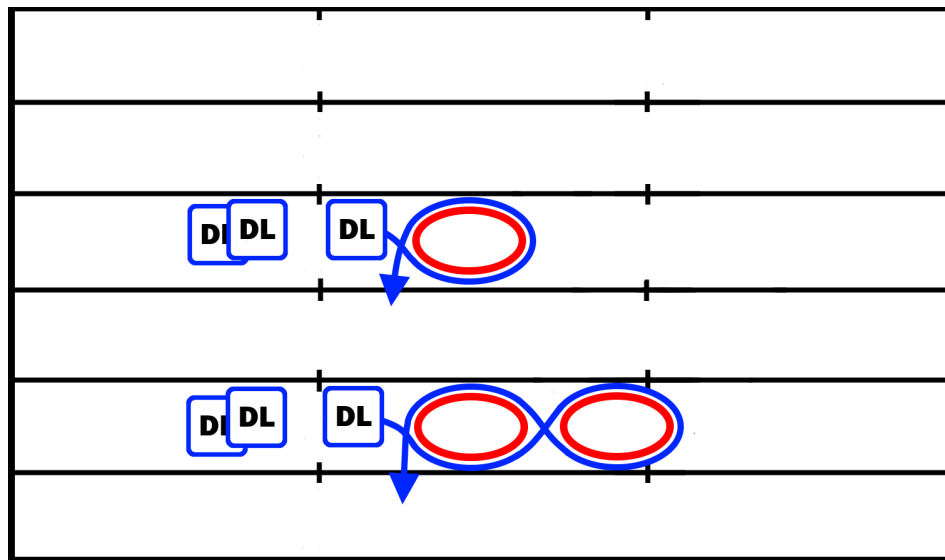
Contact Level

PURPOSE:

To work on agility and flexibility while getting the players loose.

SETUP:

You'll need 3-4 hula hoops. You can set them all up separately, or have a two hoop circuit.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. The first player in line will sprint forward, and then lean over to put their hands down on the ring as they run around in a loop.
2. Players should be focusing on getting a good lean and staying balanced and in control.

COACH'S CORNER

- Change up the route – figure 8s, around the world, players should get comfortable changing direction at full speed.
- You'll also want to change up how they run through the rings – you can have them sprint to start, but make sure to mix in some shuffles, facing both inside and outside.

LADDER SHUFFLE

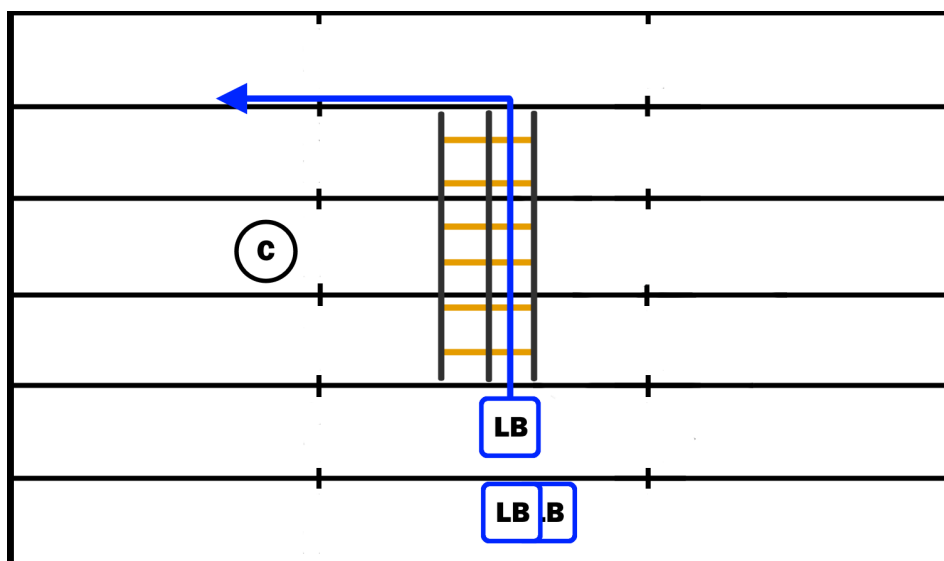


PURPOSE:

To work on a linebacker's agility and field awareness.

SETUP:

Have the players form a line at one end of the rope ladder. Stand about 5-7 yards perpendicular to it, facing the ladder.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. The first kid in line will step up on your signal, and shuffle laterally through the ladder, keeping their eyes on you (and the ball) the whole time.
2. Once they reach the end of the ladder, signal them again with the ball and they will sprint forward 10 yards, then head to back of the line.

COACH'S CORNER

- Make sure to get players practice shuffling both to the right and left.
- If you don't have a rope ladder, they are incredibly easy to make for football use. Simply head to the hardware store and buy rope, scissors and duct tape, and you're already halfway there.



DRILLS

CONTROL READ & REACT

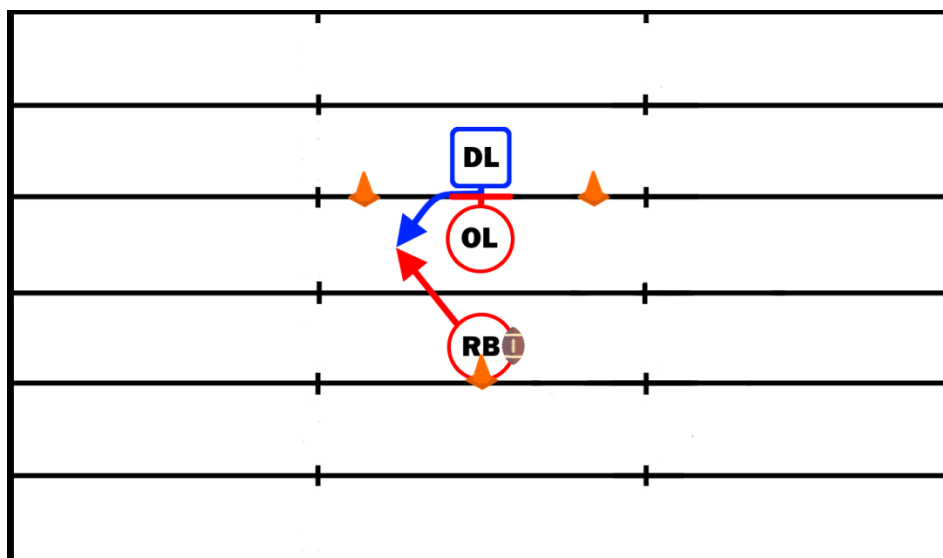


PURPOSE:

To teach defensive linemen how to diagnose a play, defeat the block, and make a tackle.

SETUP:

You'll need a ball carrier, a blocker, and a defensive lineman. Setup three cones in a triangle, all 10 yards apart.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. On the coach's signal, the D line will make contact with the O line, and the ball carrier will begin to run to his designated cone.
2. The defensive lineman must then shed the block and make the play on the ball carrier before he can get to the cone.

COACH'S CORNER

- The key for the defender is to keep his hips and shoulders square. By staying square and keeping the arms extended, they will have the leverage to defeat the block and make the play in either direction.

BAD BALL DRILL



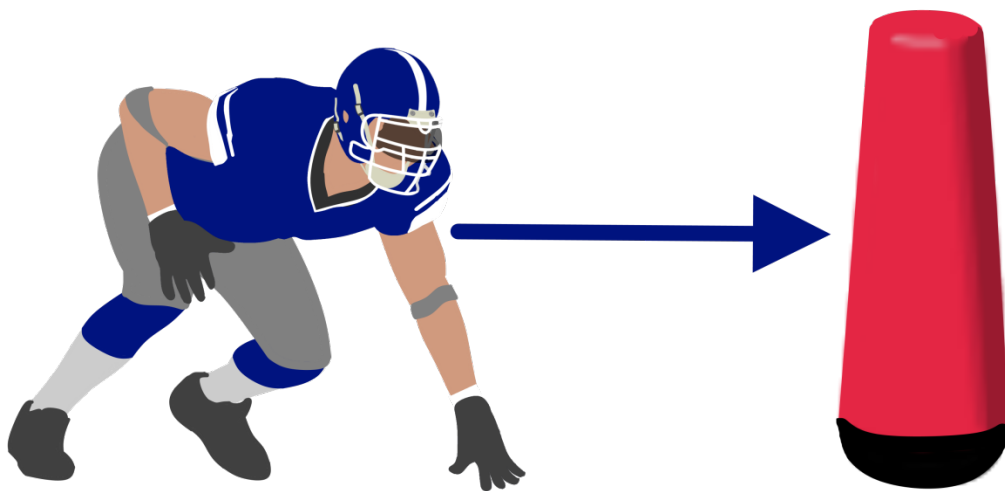
Contact Level

PURPOSE:

To work on a players ability to make difficult catches.

SETUP:

Have the receivers form a single file line, and stand about 15-20 yards in front of it. You'll also need a bunch of footballs.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. On the coach's signal, the first player in line will explode out of their stance towards the tackling dummy.
2. As they approach the dummy, they will stay low, and begin to chop their feet.
3. The tackler will make contact with the shoulder pads, keeping the head up, and leading with the same shoulder and foot.
4. The player will then wrap up, and drive through, finishing the tackle into the ground.

COACH'S CORNER

- The key to safe, effective tackling technique is to lead with the same shoulder as the front foot. This effectively takes the head out of the play – much more similar to a rugby tackle, where a player has the utmost concern for protecting his neck and head through a tackle.

1 V 1 PASS RUSH

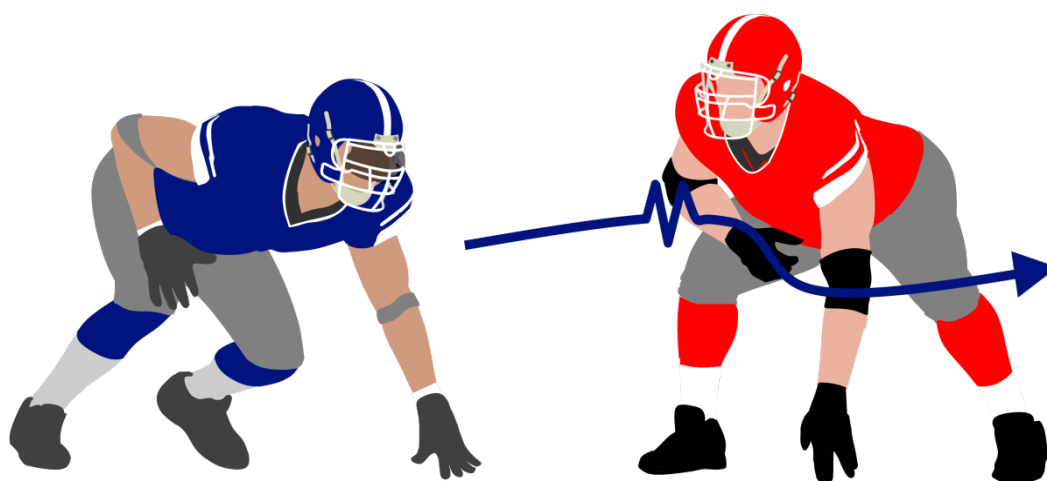


PURPOSE:

To work on pass rush moves and finishing the play in a game situation.

SETUP:

Have five offensive linemen and five defensive linemen line up across from each other. Place a dummy bag 5-7 yards behind the o-line, and stand a couple yards behind it.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Before the play begins, the coach will point to one defensive player.
2. On the coach's signal, all 5 defensive linemen will take two explosive steps forward – however only the player selected by the coach will continue past those first two steps.
3. The defensive lineman will attempt to beat his blocker and sack the quarterback.
4. If he is unable to beat his blocker before 4 seconds have passed, the coach will blow the whistle, indicating the ball has been thrown downfield and the defender should turn and chase downfield.

COACH'S CORNER

- Ideally you'd have both offensive and defensive linemen in their natural positions, but ultimately the most important thing is that they get reps.

SHED BLOCK DRILL

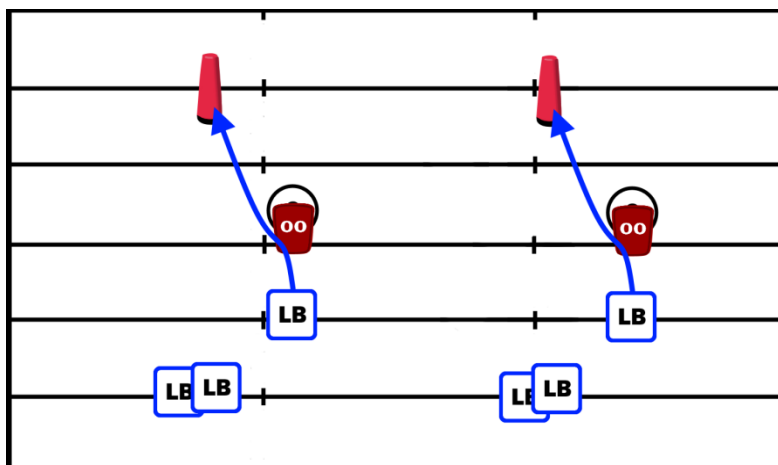


PURPOSE:

To work on defeating blocks, pursuit, and tackling.

SETUP:

You'll need a coach with a blocking shield, and a tackling dummy. The defensive players should form a line about 5-7 yards away from the coach, with the tackling dummy another 5 yards behind the coach, slightly offset to one side.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. The defender will bust out of his stance, shed the first block, and make a strong tackle on the dummy.

COACH'S CORNER

- Emphasize power, balance, and proper form on the tackle – breakdown, wrap up, hip roll!

LB PURSUIT DRILL

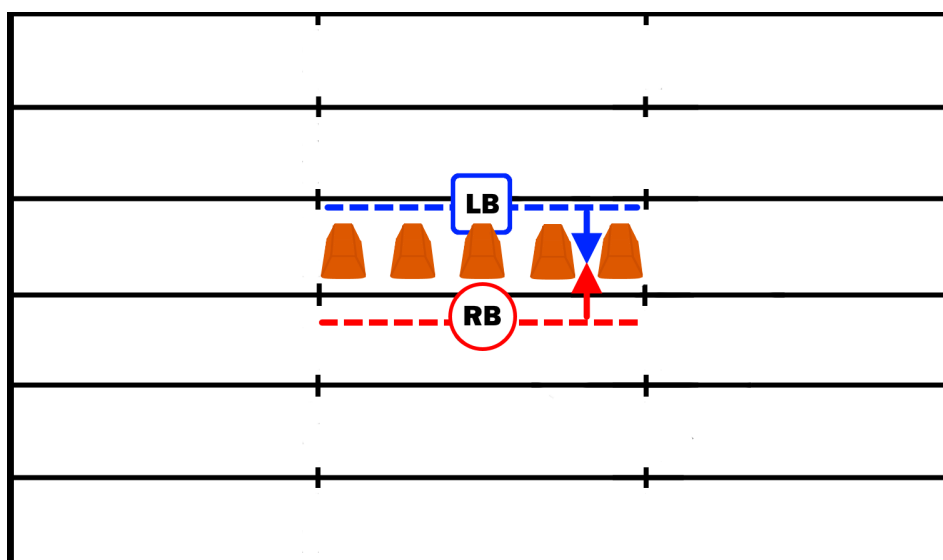


PURPOSE:

To get linebackers comfortable reading the running back and changing direction before they make a play.

SETUP:

Setup 5 agility bags, 2 yards apart. On one side of the middle agility bag will be a ball carrier, with the linebacker directly in front of him on the other side of the bag.



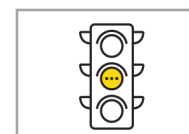
INSTRUCTIONS:

1. On the coach's signal, the RB will begin to move side to side in front of the bags, with the LB mirroring his movement.
2. On the coach's next signal, the RB will plunge up the closest lane and attempt to beat the LB out and through.
3. The LB must react, fill the lane, square up, and wrap up the ball carrier.

COACH'S CORNER

- The LB should stay square, moving laterally and in control with his eyes on the ball carrier.
- The ball carrier should use change of pace and fakes to keep the LB on his toes.

FILL THE GAP DRILL



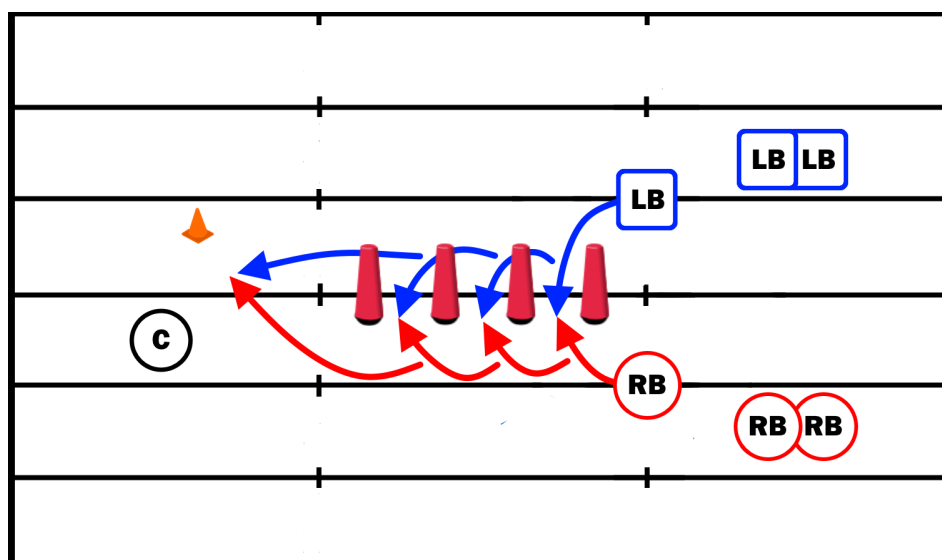
Contact Level

PURPOSE:

To teach proper pursuit and tackling techniques.

SETUP:

Line up 4 dummy bags about 2 yards apart, with a final cone 5 yards after the last bag. You'll also need two lines, ball carriers and defense, about 5 yards away from the first bag.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. On the coach's signal, the ball carrier will enter into the first hole between the bags.
2. The defender will meet the ball carrier in the hole, breakdown, wrap up and roll their hips, and then release.
3. The players will then backpedal, shuffle, and meet in the next hole, repeating the same actions.
4. The players will continue like so, until they get to the final hole, at which point the ball carrier will explode to the final cone, with the defender making an angle tackle

COACH'S CORNER

- Make sure you run this drill going in both directions!

ANGLE RUN DRILL



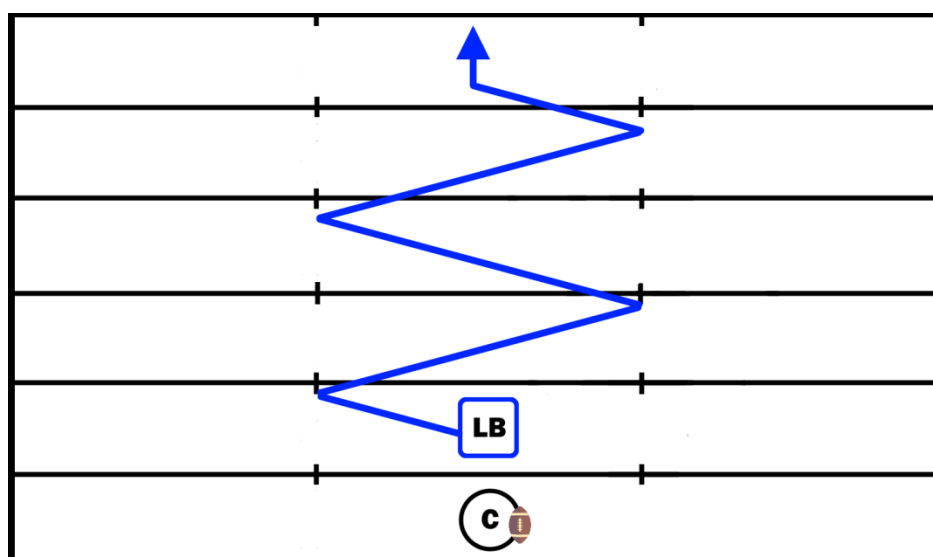
Contact Level

PURPOSE:

To work on agility, reaction and awareness.

SETUP:

All you'll need for this drill is a coach, a football, and a player.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. The defender will keep his eyes on the ball the entirety of the play.
2. The play begins on ball movement. The coach will point to the right or left with the ball, with the defender angle running back at a 45 degree angle – while still maintaining eye contact with the football.
3. The coach will continue to move the player left and right until he points straight back, at which point the defender will plant, turn, and sprint downfield 5 yards.

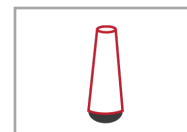
COACH'S CORNER

- Instead of just motioning downfield, you can instead throw a pass up for the defender to chase down an intercept.

SACK DRILL



Intermediate



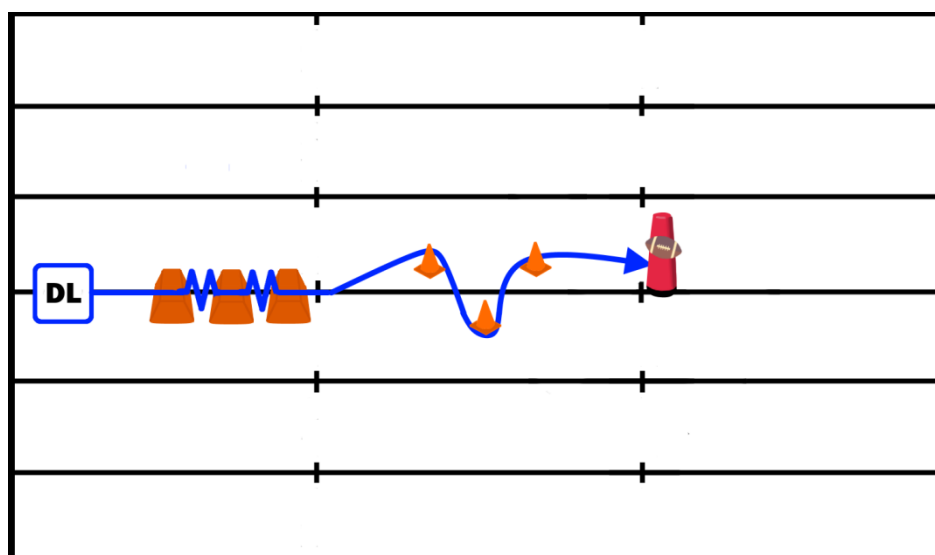
Contact Level

PURPOSE:

To teach and reinforce correct tackling fundamentals, good footwork, and a nose for the football.

SETUP:

You'll need 3 agility bags, 3 cones, and a standup dummy. Place the three agility bags 2-3 yards apart, and 5 yards downfield, place the cones in the shape of a triangle with each cone 5 yards apart. Lastly, the dummy bag should be 5-7 yards downfield from the last cone.



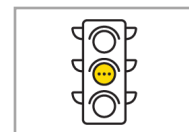
INSTRUCTIONS:

1. The first player in line will get down in a 3 point stance. Use a football as a visual signal for the defensive lineman to get off.
2. The defensive lineman will explode through the agility bags getting his knees up high, then breaking out to the first cone, going around all three.
3. Lastly, the player will sprint for the dummy bag and attempt to perform a strip on the ball as they sack the dummy bag.

COACH'S CORNER

- Much like the RB Gauntlet drill, you're free to create any combination of obstacles in the defensive linemans path that they need to avoid to sack the QB.

STRIP THE CATCH DRILL



Contact Level

PURPOSE:

To teach defenders how to attack the ball as they make the tackle.

SETUP:

Have players break off into groups of 3 – a passer, a receiver, and a defender. The defender line up overtop of the receiver, and the passer will stand at the LOS.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. The passer will snap the ball, and the receiver will run a simple 5 and out.
2. The passer will hit the receiver with a pass – and as the receiver is catching the ball, the defender will close in and attempt to strip the ball out of the receivers hands.

COACH'S CORNER

- As the defender closes in, he should reach out with the top arm and club down hard over the receivers far shoulder and through the catch hand.
- With his back arm, the defender should reach down and pull on the near arm of the receiver.



GAME PREP

SCREEN REACTION DRILL

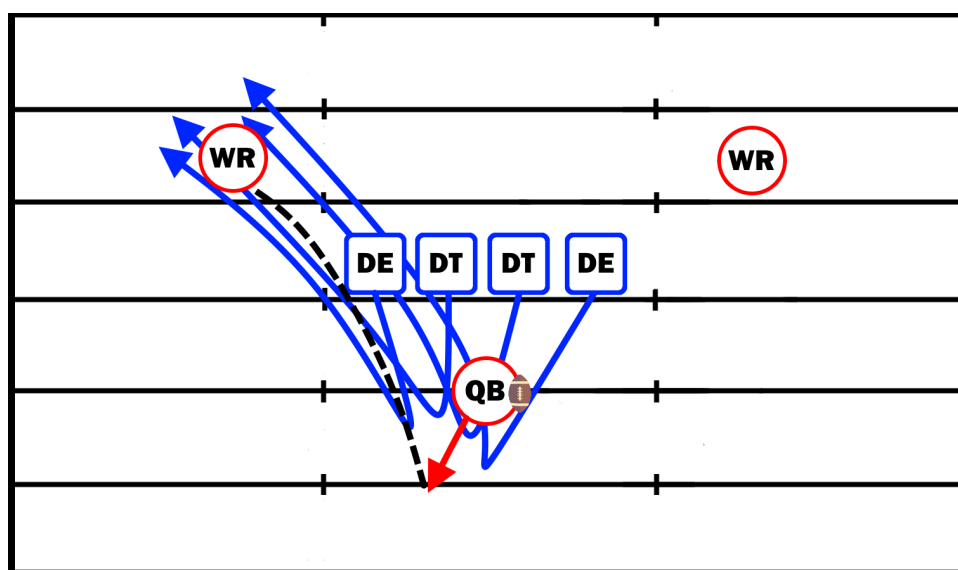


PURPOSE:

To teach defensive lineman how to react to and pursue the ball on a screen pass.

SETUP:

Have four defensive linemen lay down on their backs, with their heads on the LOS. The QB line up 5 yards behind the line with a ball in hand, and two receivers will line up 5-7 yards downfield and 10-15 yards apart, also with a ball in hand.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. On the coach's signal, the defenders will all get to their feet as quickly as they can and pursue the QB on his dropback.
2. The QB will then "throw" the ball to one of two receivers. When the QB makes his throwing motion, the defenders will all cut and run towards one of the two stationary receivers downfield.
3. To finish, each defensive linemen must touch the ball in the WRs extended hand as they run past.

COACH'S CORNER

- It's important that the linemen stay in their lanes and do not abandon their contain responsibilities while in pursuit of the QB.

OPEN FIELD TACKLING

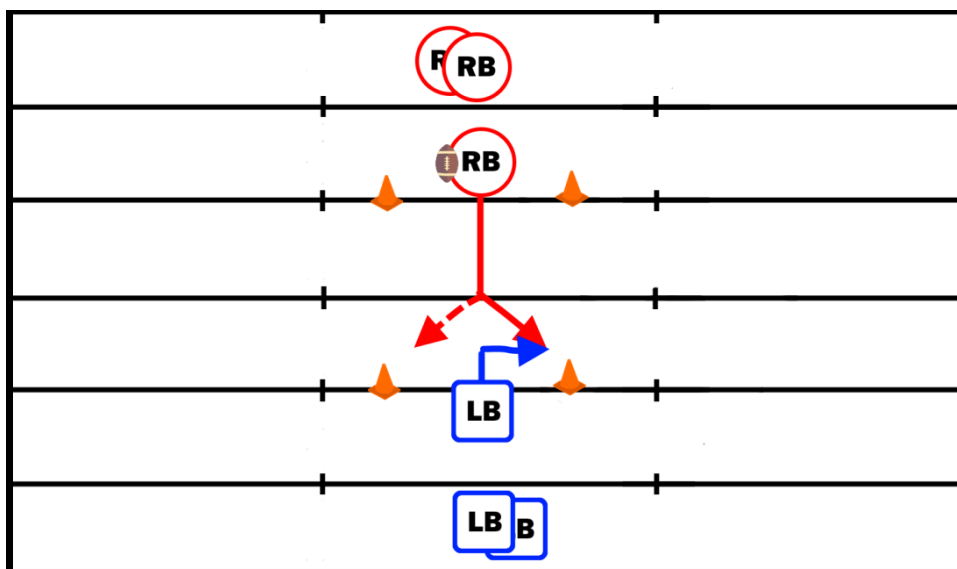


PURPOSE:

To work on pursuit and tackling form in the open field.

SETUP:

Setup 4 cones, all 10 yards apart. Have the LB's form a line on one end, with the ball carriers on the other end with a football in hand. The coach will stand behind the LBs, in view of the RBs.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. The first player in line will step up and beginning running forward.
2. The LB will step up stay square. After the RB has run about 5 yards the coach will direct the runner either right or left.
3. The LB will then close in and tackle the ball carrier before they get past the cones.

COACH'S CORNER

- The key is for the LB to keep his feet moving and stay focused on the players torso – you can't juke with your hips!

BLOCK RECOGNITION DRILL



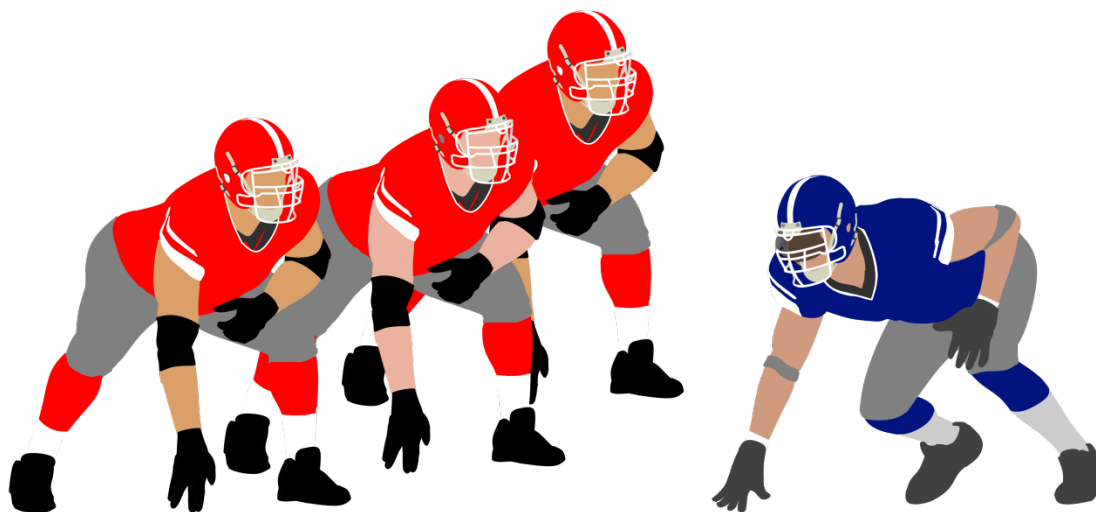
Contact Level

PURPOSE:

To get defenders reps reacting to and dealing with a variety of blocks in a game-like situation.

SETUP:

Have three offensive linemen get down in stance, with a defensive lineman over top of the middle lineman. You'll also need a coach to stand behind the defensive lineman.



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. The coach will signal to the offensive linemen what kind of block to perform – drop into pass, zone block, combo – whatever you like.
2. The defender must then recognize the type of block and then defeat it to get into the backfield

COACH'S CORNER

- For an extra challenge, see if the defender can shout out the kind of block the offense is performing as soon as they see it. You can even get teammates in on the drill – this is a great way to reinforce communication between players!

TEAM PURSUIT DRILL



Intermediate



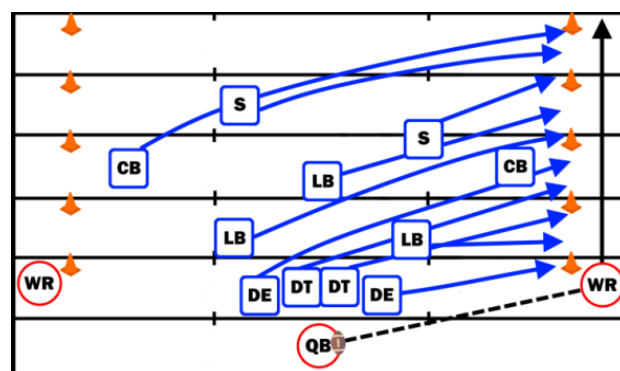
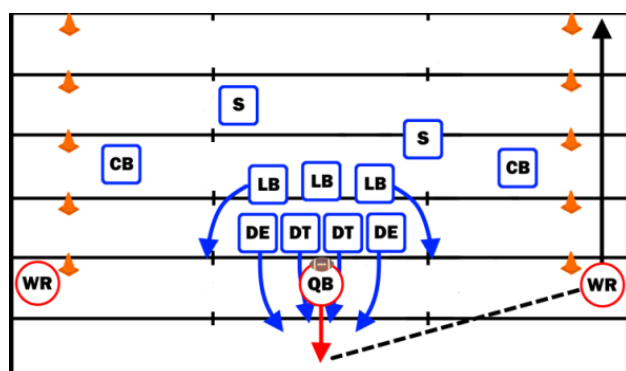
Contact Level

PURPOSE:

To work on pursuit angles and drive home the importance of finishing the play.

SETUP:

You'll need your entire defense out there, lined up as they would normally, in a 4-3 or 3-4. Parallel to the LOS and every 5 yards down after, you will place cones on both sidelines. Lastly you will need a QB with a ball at the LOS, and a WR at each of the cones on the LOS.



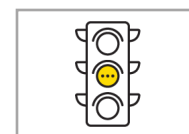
INSTRUCTIONS:

1. The QB will snap the ball and take a 5 step drop – the linemen will rush, with the rest of the players stepping into their gaps.
2. The QB will then pass the ball to the WR on 1 of 2 predesignated sides.
3. On the release of the ball, each player must and give chase in their proper pursuit angles, as shown in the illustration above.
4. On the catch, the WR will take off downfield, giving the players a visual cue - along with the cones, as to where and when they should be meeting the runner.

COACH'S CORNER

- There is no tackling in this drill – this is a team pursuit drill, not a tackling drill, and players will simply run hard through the cone without obstructing the WR.

TEAM PLAY REVIEW



Contact Level

PURPOSE:

To teach, run, and perfect your favorite defensive plays.

SETUP:

You'll need your full defense aligned as normal, with at least a skeleton offense out there to give someone for the defense to read their keys on.

PLAY CALLING CHART			
MONEY PLAY 1	MONEY PLAY 2	RUN PLAYS	ZONE
		Power Counter Sweep Dive Option	Cover 2 Cover 3 Cover 4 Cover 6
		SHORT PASS	
MONEY PLAY 3	MONEY PLAY 4	Drive HB Angle Stick Scat	
		SPECIALS	Nickel Blitz Cover 0 Cover 1
		Punt Fake - FB Dive Punt Fake - P Pass	

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Give your MLB the play, and have him tell the rest of the defense the playcall.
2. The defense will then break to the LOS and get into position.
3. Have the offense snap the ball and run a dummy play.
4. Keep a close eye on all players, and make sure to they are running the defense exactly as designed.
5. Give the defense another call and let them run it again.

COACH'S CORNER

- Can be run against a half speed dummy offense, or a skeleton offense with just skill positions.
- Remember – running 3 plays extremely well makes for a much more effective defense than having 100 calls that no one is very confident in.



PRACTICE PLANS

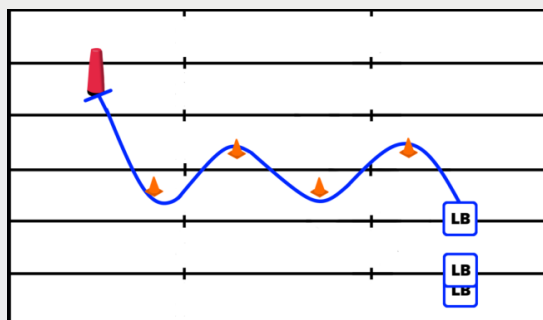
60 MINUTE DEFENSIVE PRACTICE

Required: : 3 Coaches, Footballs, Cones, Stand Up Dummies, Blocking Shields

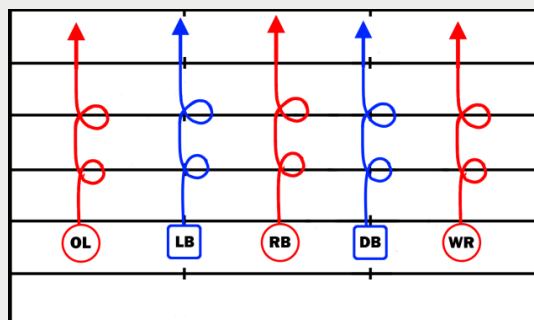
Warmup:

10 Mins (Full Team)

LB Agility Drill - 5 mins



Run & Roll Drill - 5 mins



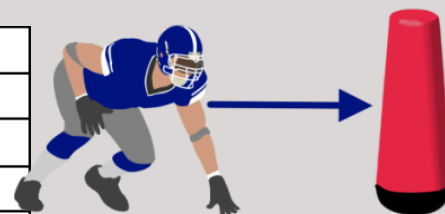
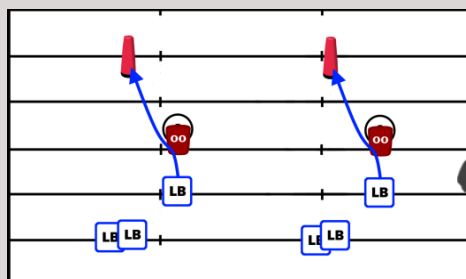
Station Block 1:

30 Mins (Split Team Into 3 Groups and Rotate Through Each Drill For 10 Mins)



Strip the Catch Drill - 10 mins

Shed Block Drill - 10 mins

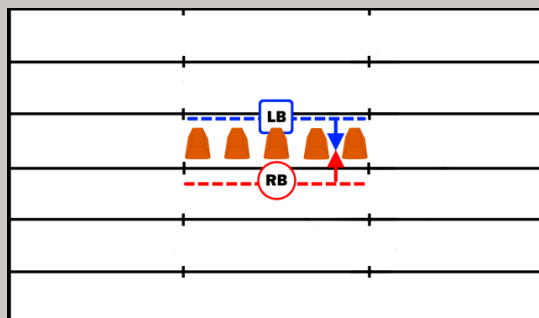


Form Tackling - 10 mins

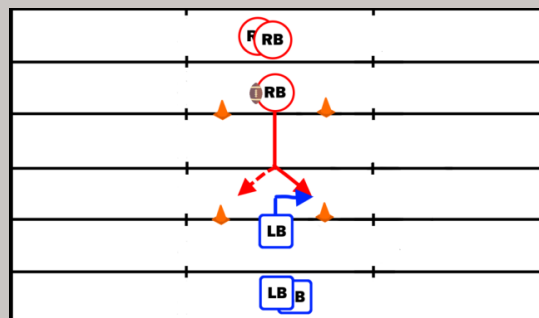
Game Preparation:

20 Mins (Full Team)

LB Pursuit Drill - 10 mins



Open Field Tackling - 10 mins



60 MINUTE DEFENSIVE PRACTICE

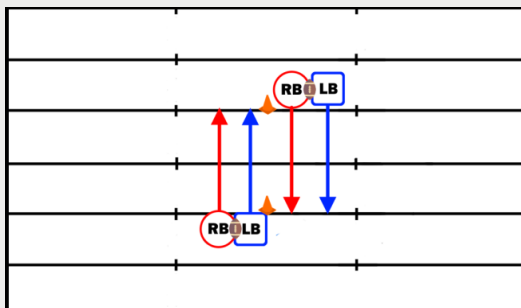
Required: 2 Coaches, Footballs, Cones, Stand Up Dummies

Warmup:

15 Mins (Full Team)

Dynamic Warmup: 5 mins (High Knees, Buttckickers, Frankensteins, Lunge & Twist, Knee Hug, Straight Leg Run)

Ball Wrestling - 5 mins



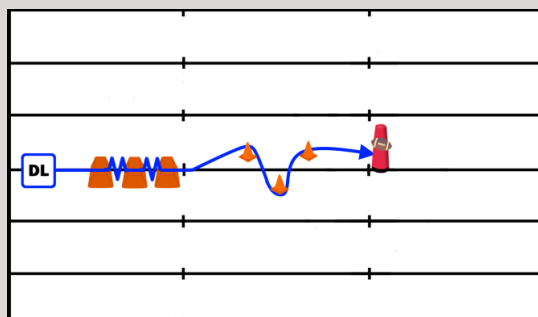
Balance Drill - 5 mins



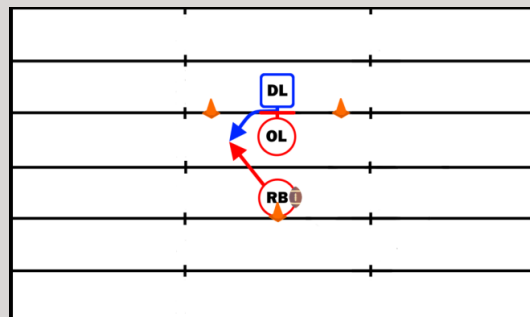
Station Block 1:

20 Mins (Split Team Into Two Groups and Rotate Through Each Drill For 10 Mins)

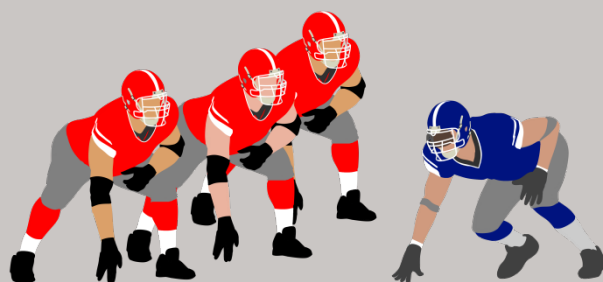
Sack Drill - 10 mins



Control Read & React - 10 mins

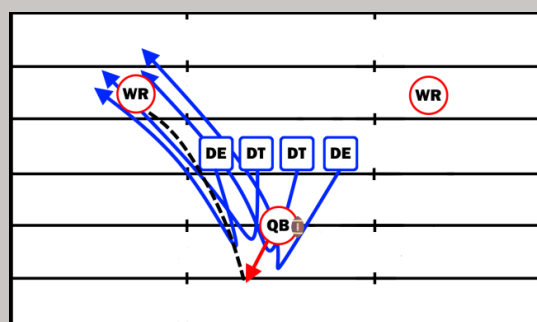


Game Preparation: 20 Mins (Full Team)



Block Recognition Drill - 20 mins

Screen Reaction Drill - 20 mins



90 MINUTE DEFENSIVE PRACTICE

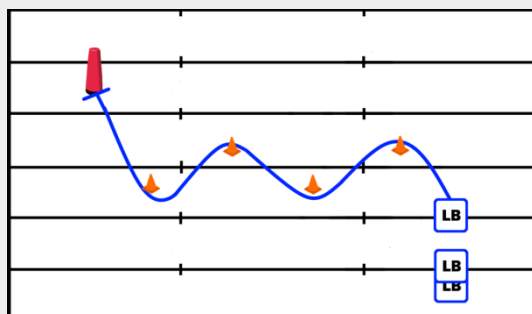
Required: : 3 Coaches, Footballs, Cones, Stand Up Dummies, Blocking Shields

Warmup:

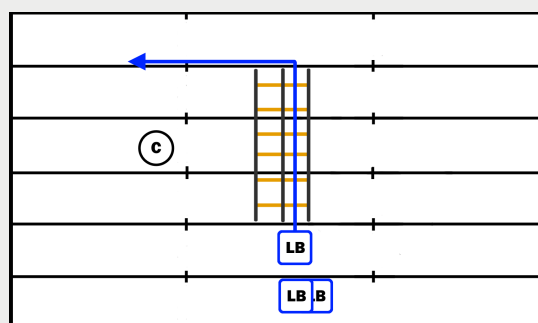
15 Mins (Full Team)

Dynamic Warmup: 5 mins (High Knees, Butt-kickers, Frankensteins, Lunge & Twist, Knee Hug, Straight Leg Run)

LB Agility Drill - 5 mins



LB Ladder Drill - 5 mins

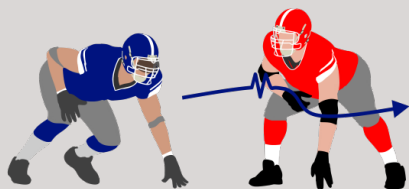


Station Block1:

30 Mins (Split Team Into 3 Groups and Rotate Through Each Drill For 10 Mins)

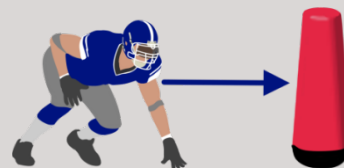
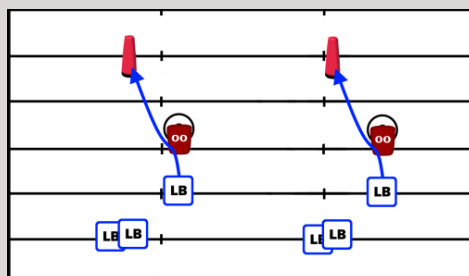
Shed Block Drill

- 15 mins



1 v 1 Pass Rush Drill

- 10 mins

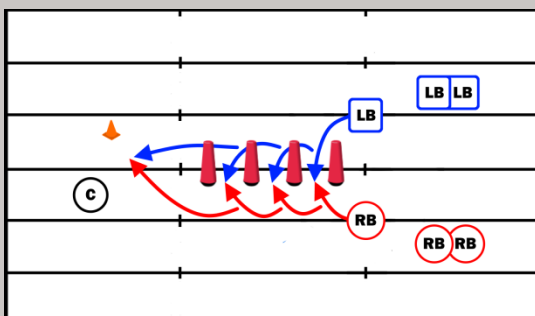


Form Tackling

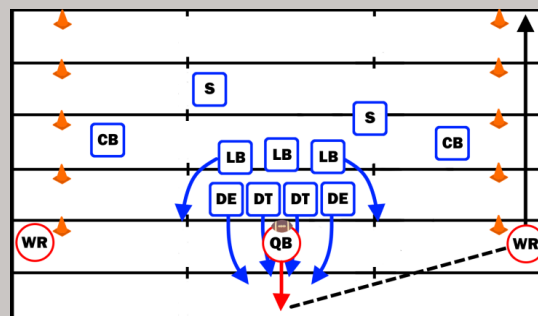
- 10 mins

Game Preparation: 30 Mins (Full Team)

Goal Line Passing - 12 mins



Team Pursuit - 18 mins



Defensive Play Review - 10 Mins

Practice your defensive plays at half speed against a dummy offense. Then full speed against a skeleton offense at "Control" level

90 MINUTE DEFENSIVE PRACTICE

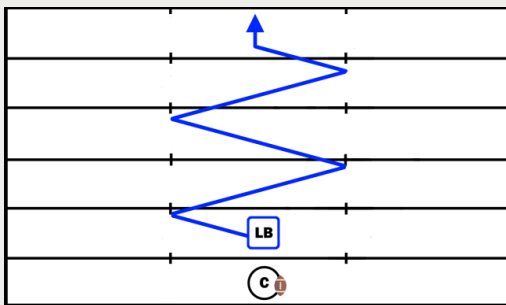
Required: 3 Coaches, Footballs, Cones, Stand Up Dummies

Warmup:

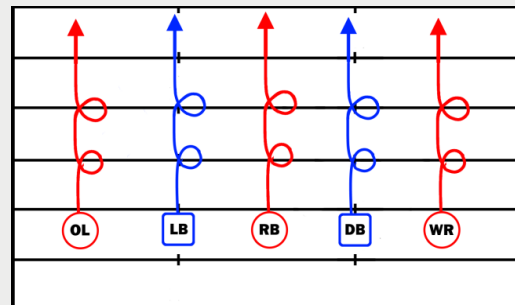
15 Mins (Full Team)

Dynamic Warmup: 5 mins (High Knees, Buttckickers, Frankensteins, Lunge & Twist, Knee Hug, Straight Leg Run)

Angle Run - 5 mins



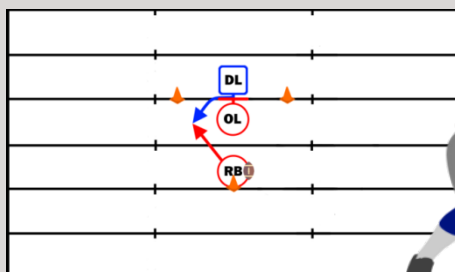
Run & Roll Drill - 5 mins



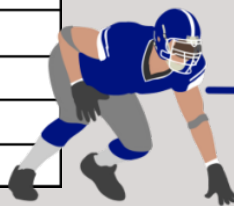
Station Block 1:

30 Mins 30 Mins (Split Team Into 3 Groups and Rotate Through Each Drill For 10 Mins)

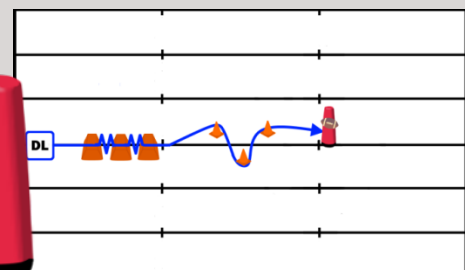
Control Read & React - 10 mins



Form Tackling - 10 mins

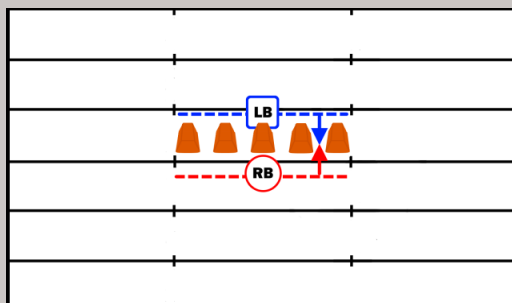


Sack Drill - 10 mins



Game Preparation: 30 Mins (Full Team)

LB Pursuit Drill - 15 mins



Block Recognition Drill - 15 mins



Team Play Review - 10 Mins

Practice your defensive plays at half speed against a dummy offense. Then full speed against a skeleton offense at "Control" level

120 MINUTE DEFENSIVE PRACTICE

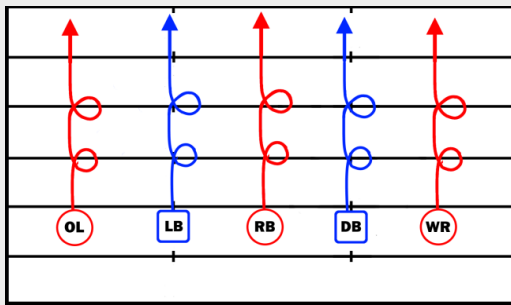
Required: 2 Coaches, Footballs, Cones, Stand Up Dummies

Warmup:

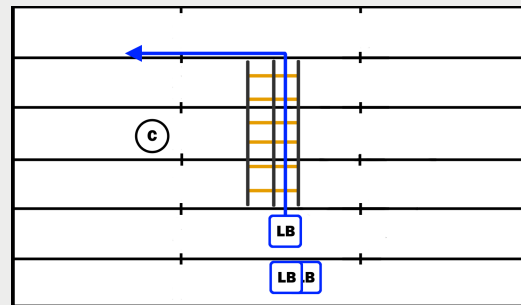
15 Mins (Full Team)

Dynamic Warmup: 5 mins (High Knees, Buttckickers, Frankensteins, Lunge & Twist, Knee Hug, Straight Leg Run)

Angle Run - 5 mins



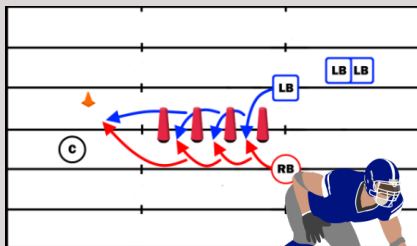
LB Ladder Drill - 5 mins



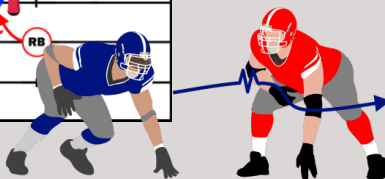
Station Block 1:

40 Mins (Split Team Into 2 Groups and Rotate Through Each Drill For 10 Mins)

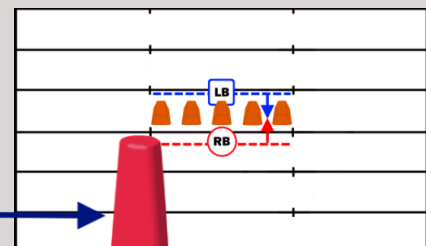
Fill the Gap Drill - 10 mins



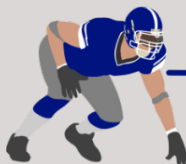
1 v 1 Pass Rush - 10 mins



LB Pursuit Drill - 10 mins

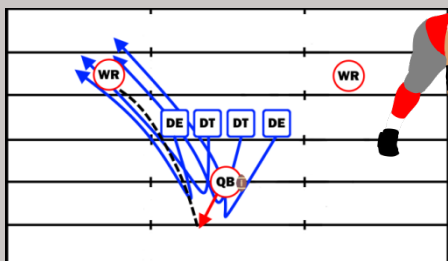


Form Tackling Drill - 10 mins

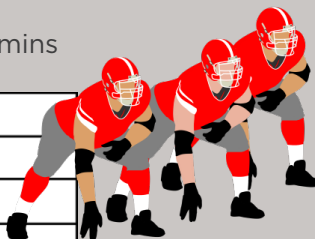


Game Preparation: 35 Mins (Full Team)

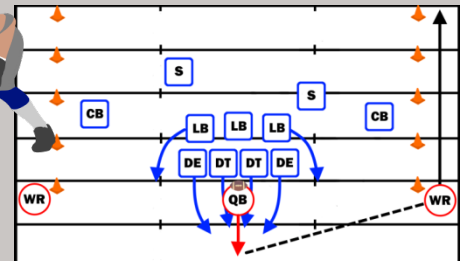
Screen Reaction Drill - 11 mins



Block Recognition Drill - 11 mins



Team Pursuit Drill - 13 mins



Team Play Review - 20 Mins

Practice your defensive plays at half speed against a dummy offense. Then full speed against a skeleton offense at "Control" level