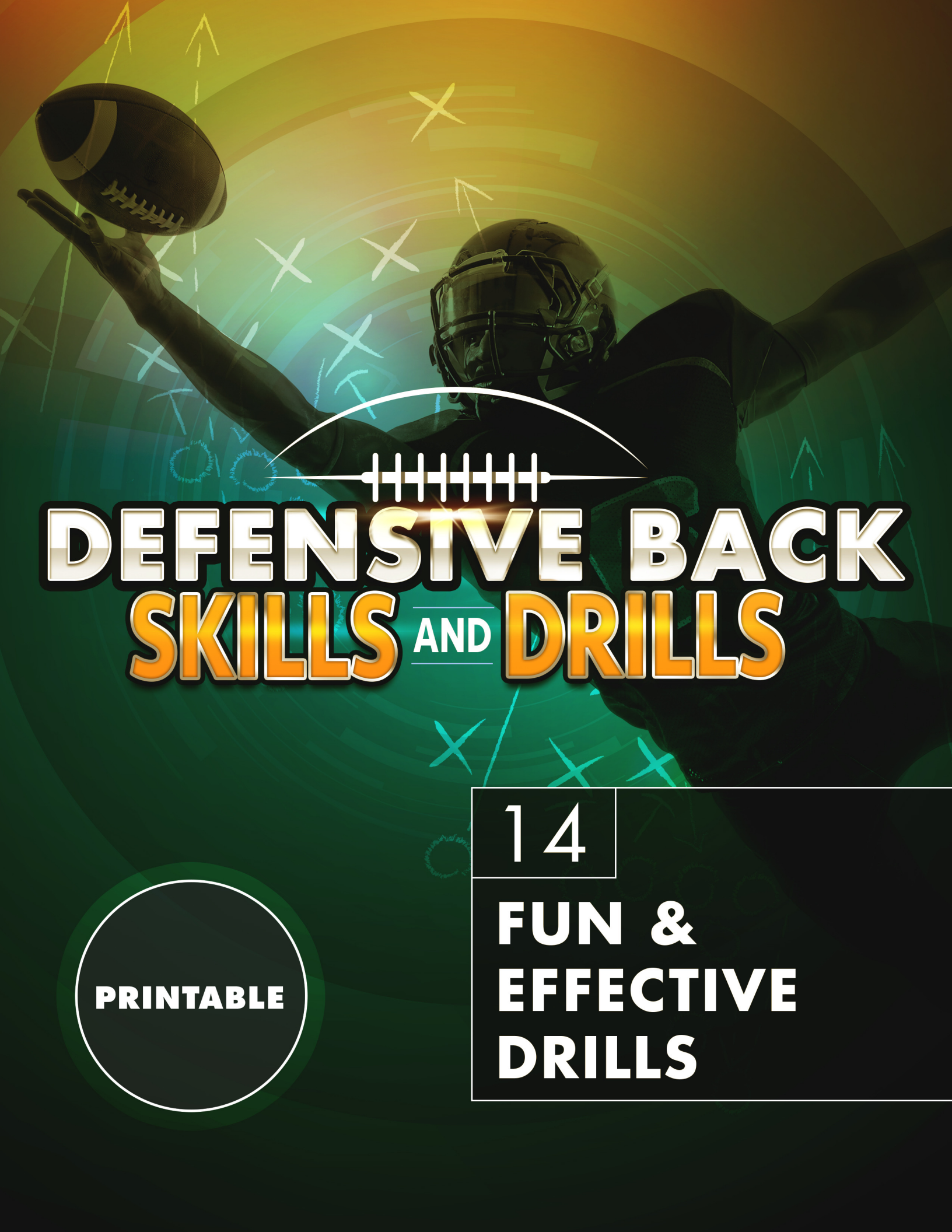




DEFENSIVE BACK SKILLS AND DRILLS

14

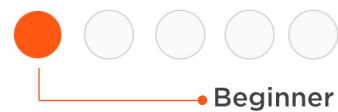
**FUN &
EFFECTIVE
DRILLS**

PRINTABLE

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DEFENSIVE BACK STANCE



Equipment: N/A



Purpose: To teach and emphasize the importance of starting every play in a good defensive back stance.



Setup: Players will spread out with a few yards between them.



Player getting in stance as coach evaluates.

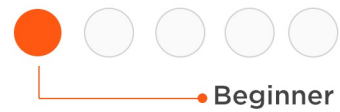
INSTRUCTIONS

1. One at a time, the coach will call each player forward and have them get into stance.
2. The player should have their feet shoulder width or less apart, knees bent and hips flexed with their nose over their toes and their hands up and in the ready position.
3. After evaluating their stance, have them step back and move on to evaluating the next player, until every player has established a good defensive back stance.

COACHING TIPS

- Their lower body should be in the 'Z' position – this is a good way of helping the players visualize the angles they want to have in their ankles, knees, and hips.
- The defensive back needs to be able to move in any direction as soon as the ball is snapped, which is why they have a more compact stance in comparison to linebackers.
- Safeties and hybrid players can be slightly more upright in their stance, and in general players will all have slightly different stances depending on their size and body shape – focus on the fundamentals and the rest will work its way out.

BACKPEDAL DRILL



Equipment: N/A



Purpose: To develop the proper foundation for a defensive backs footwork and technique when moving in pass coverage.



Setup: Have the players form a line, with the first player in line stepping forward and turning around to face the line.



Player executing backpedal with correct technique.

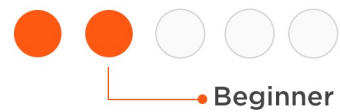
INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the players will break and begin to backpedal.
2. As they backpedal, they should focus on keeping their chest down and keeping their weight on the balls of their feet.
3. Player will continue to backpedal for about 10-15 yards, driving their heels back with each step and focusing on pumping the arms the same way they would if they were moving forward.
4. Have the next player in line step up and continue the drill.

COACHING TIPS

- When first teaching this technique, go one at a time and take the time to evaluate each player's technique. Make sure that they are starting each rep in the correct stance, with a strong Z in the lower body and that they maintain something close to that posture as they continue to backpedal, keeping their weight on the balls of their feet and their nose over their toes.

RETRACE TRANSITION DRILL



Equipment: N/A



Setup: Have the players form a line, with the first player in line stepping forward and turning around to face the line.



Purpose: To develop the defender's ability to change direction quickly and in control when in pass coverage.

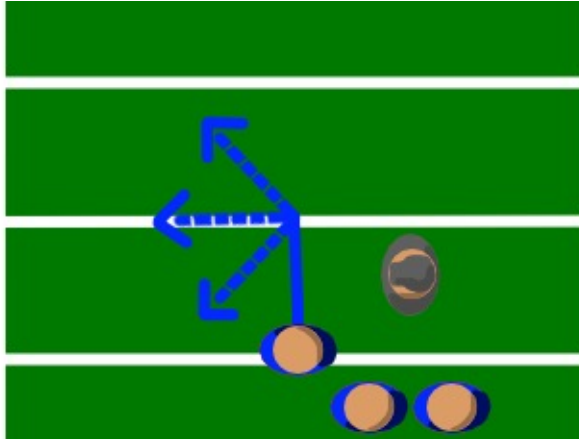


Diagram demonstrating the multitude of angles we can use the Retrace drill to practice.



Player performing the retrace drill at a 90 degree angle.

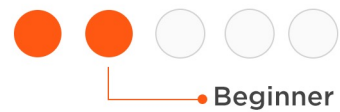
INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the players will break and begin to backpedal.
2. On the next signal from the coach, the player will plant their back foot and drive forward, retracing their steps and sprinting past their initial starting position.
3. Next player in line steps up and repeats the drill.

COACHING TIPS

- Once your players are comfortable with the backpedal, teaching them how to quickly and efficiently change directions at full speed without getting their feet tangled or throwing their balance off will give them the foundation to build on and develop their game sense and ball skills.
- Focus on making sure players are making that transition without any false steps or wasted motion.
- There are also variations of this drill; next we will use it to work on breaking forward at a 45 degree angle, breaking to the side at a 90 degree angle, and dropping back at a 45 degree angle, preparing them for a wide variety of game situations. Also – make sure to run this drill moving to both the left and right sides.

W DRILL



Equipment: N/A



Purpose: To build on the fundamentals established in the backpedal and retrace drills in a more game-like situation.



Setup: Have the players form a line with the first player stepping up and facing the coach. They should have at least 10 yards of space behind them and 10 yards to their left.

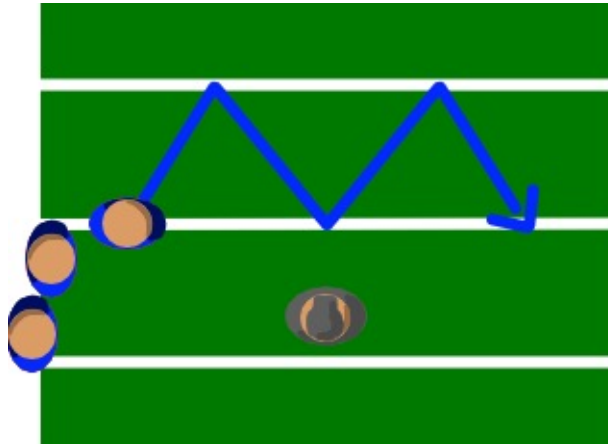


Diagram of W Drill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the player will begin to backpedal at a 45-degree angle.
2. Once they have backed up 5 yards, they will plant and drive forward, again at a 45-degree angle away from where they began.
3. After sprinting forward another 5 yards, they will plant the front foot and begin to backpedal again, at a 45 degree angle, continuing to the left.
4. They will backpedal another 5 yards, plant the backfoot and drive forward 5 yards once more, finishing the rep and completing the 'W'.

COACHING TIPS

- Emphasize the importance of starting this drill in a good stance driving their arms and staying low – this is similar to the retrace drill, but instead of one plant and go, they will do it 4 consecutive times.
- This drill can be especially important to work for safeties and taller corners who may not already move as smoothly as their smaller, more agile counterparts. By drilling these techniques into their muscle memory, we will help them develop the foundation for the same smooth movement a smaller player will display.

BUDDY DRILL



Equipment: 2-3 Footballs.



Purpose: To develop a player's ability to read the QB and break on the ball using the fundamentals they've developed.



Setup: Have players pair off with teammates of similar size and ability and form a line 10-20 yards in front of the coach. Coach will start with a football.



Player breaking on the ball and swatting with the inside arm.

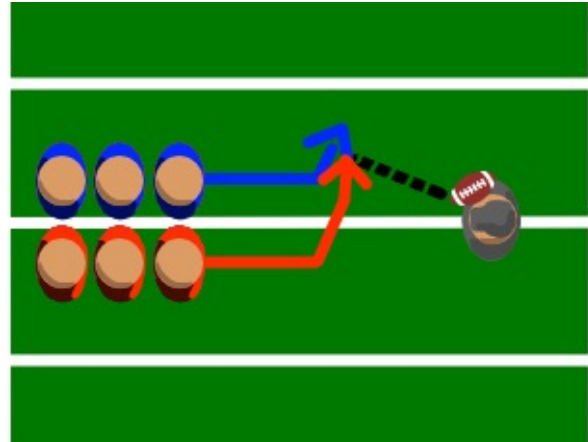


Diagram of players performing the Buddy Drill.

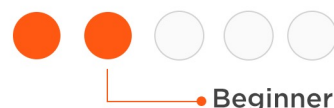
INSTRUCTIONS

1. The coach will start the drill by snapping the ball, queuing the players to begin lightly jogging towards him.
2. When they are about 10 yards away, the coach will open his shoulders up to either the left or right side and begin to throw to that player.
3. The player the coach is throwing to will then become the receiver with the other player becoming the defender. The defender must immediately react and break on the ball, going for the interception if possible but otherwise just swatting the ball down to the ground with their lead arm.

COACHING TIPS

- While they may not be able to read the QB's eyes, the DBs can always react to the QB's shoulder. As the players approach, the QB/Coach will have to open his shoulders in one of two directions – this will be their tip-off as to what direction the Coach is about to throw the ball.
- The key to the proper footwork here is to get the outside foot in the ground, break towards the throw and transition right through the football, reaching with the front arm to swat the ball while maintaining contact on the receiver with their back arm so that in a game situation they would be able to secure the tackle should they miss the ball.
- As players become more comfortable with the drill, you can make it less obvious which side you are going to throw to as well as throwing the ball wider out to the offense side, making it more difficult for the defender to make a play on the ball.

JAMMING TECHNIQUE



Equipment: N/A



Purpose: To teach the proper jamming technique for press man-to-man coverage.



Setup: Have players pair off with a teammate and get down on their knees across from each other.



Players on ground ready to perform Jamming Technique Drill.



Players executing cross-arm jam technique, making strong contact on the inside shoulder of the receiver.

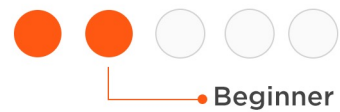
INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the receivers will begin to simulate jogging.
2. The coach will signal again, indicating that the receivers are 'releasing off the line'.
3. The receivers will then rotate their shoulders to the right as if trying to release outside, and the defender will jam them with their inside arm on the receivers inside shoulder, making firm contact with their palm on the chest plate of the receiver.
4. Reset, and continue until they've done 3 reps going to both the left and right.
5. At this point, we will continue the drill, but allow the receiver to choose whether they want to simulate a release to the left or right, with the defender reacting appropriately.

COACHING TIPS

- The first instinct of a lot of players will be to jam the outside shoulder with the outside arm on the release – this is a big no-no. Even if they get a good jam on the outside shoulder, the receiver will be able to release inside uncontested, putting themselves between the defense and the ball. By jamming with the inside arm not only will the defender be in between the receiver and the QB, they will naturally open their hips, allowing them to transition more smoothly into coverage with the receiver.

PRESS MAN TRANSITION DRILL



Equipment: N/A



Purpose: To teach players the fundamentals of playing press man coverage.



Setup: Have players pair off with teammates of similar size and speed, with the first pair up on the LOS facing each other.



Coach evaluating players footwork and arm placement as they executing their press off the line.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the receiver will break off the line and begin to release to the outside.
2. The DB will jam them with the inside arm, planting it firmly on the receivers inside chest plate.
3. The DB will open up their hips to the outside, dropping their back foot to allow them to stay with the receiver and push him to the sideline as they move downfield.
4. Run this drill at 25-50% speed, taking the time to critique and fix every single step through the initial release.

COACHING TIPS

- Emphasize the importance of protecting the inside release using their hand, positioning, and alignment to ensure the receiver can't get a clean release inside.
- Wide receivers are some of the quickest, most agile players on the field, but even they can't go anywhere their torso doesn't – teach your DBs to stay focused on the torso, even specifically the inside chest plate, as this will give them the best change of reacting to and predicting the receivers route.

PRESS MAN TRAIL TECHNIQUE



Equipment: Set up 4 cones, about 5 yards apart.



Purpose: To take the techniques we have established in the press man transition drill and apply them to a game-like situation.



Setup: Have players pair off with a teammate and form a line, with the first pair stepping up onto the LOS and facing each other.



Player transitioning from press off the line into trail technique downfield.

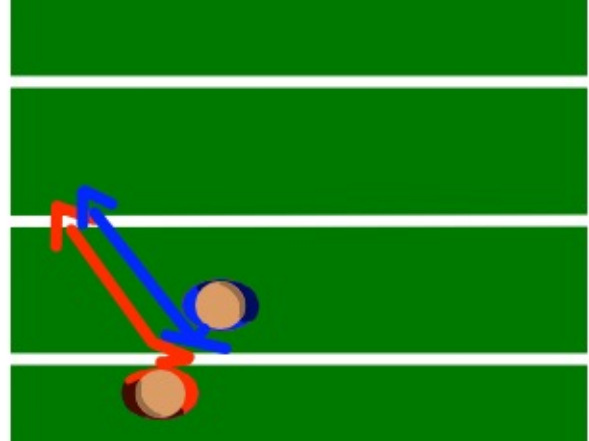


Diagram of players performing the Press Man Trail Technique drill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the receiver will release to the outside, with the defensive back jamming with the inside arm on the inside shoulder, dropping the back foot and opening up the hips.
2. As the receiver moves downfield, the defender will run alongside while maintaining contact with the arm they initially jammed with.
3. As they continue downfield and push the receiver out to the sideline, the corner should look back over their inside shoulder, so that they can see where the QB is looking and anticipate the throw if necessary.

COACHING TIPS

- Most of the time we don't want the defender to always be hip to hip with receiver – this is because on a jump ball or underthrown ball, the receiver can simply push the defender past him and make an uncontested play on the ball.
- We will ask our corners to play hip to hip sometimes, but it is a much more advanced technique. For example, if the corner is on an island without any safety help, they will need to play more in stride with the receiver, as if they get beat deep it will likely be a touchdown.

IN PHASE DRILL



Equipment: A football.



Purpose: To teach players the correct technique for making a play on the ball when in phase with the receiver.



Setup: Have players pair off with a teammate and form a line, with the first pair stepping up onto the LOS and facing each other with the defender shading to the inside.



Player defending in phase and making a play on the ball.

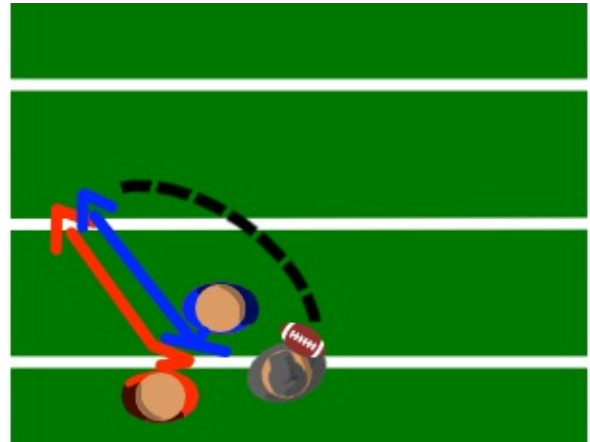


Diagram of players performing the In Phase Drill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the receiver will release to the outside and the corner will press him with the inside arm on the inside shoulder.
2. The defender will open up their hips to the sideline and turn to run with the receiver while maintaining contact, keeping their hand on their hip.
3. Once they get out of the initial release, the receiver should stay 'in phase' with the receiver, mirroring their route and looking back over the shoulder to keep an eye on the QB.
4. The coach will then throw a pass to the receiver, with the DB reaching with their inside arm and swatting the ball down while maintaining contact with the receiver.

COACHING TIPS

- The DB should aim to keep their hand on the receivers inside hip – not interrupting their movement, but disrupting it. We can do this by simply getting an arm in the way of the receivers natural running motion and making it more difficult for them to get into a rhythm.

OUT OF PHASE DRILL



Equipment: A football.



Purpose: To teach players how to close the distance and make a play on a receiver who has created separation and gotten open.



Setup: Have players pair off with a teammate and form a line, with the first pair stepping up onto the LOS and facing each other with the defender shading to the inside.



Player closing the distance and making a play on the ball from out of phase.

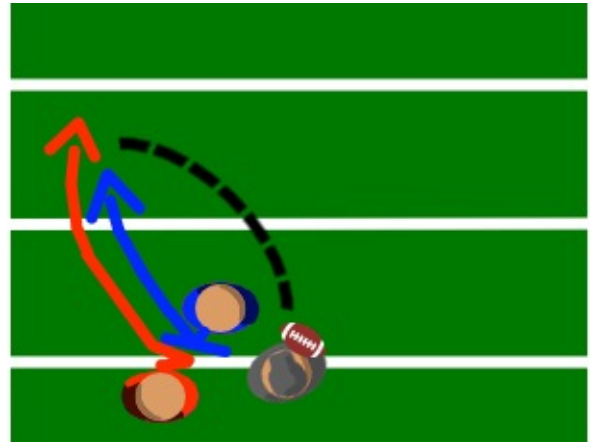


Diagram of players performing the Out of Phase Drill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal the receiver will release inside and the DB will jam the inside shoulder.
2. The receiver will 'beat' the DB, gaining a few yards of separation as they move downfield.
3. The coach will lob a pass up over the defender, who must then close the distance on the receiver and make a blind play on the ball.

COACHING TIPS

- When a DB is out of phase, there is no point in looking back to see the ball, as they aren't in a position to make a play on it. They need focus entirely on closing that gap to the receiver.
- To do so, we will coach our players to focus on the V at the neck of the receiver and essentially become a track athlete, giving everything they've got and going full speed ahead to get as close to the receiver as possible.
- When they see the receiver's hands go up, the DB will secure the tackle with the back hand and attempt to strip or knock the ball free with their front hand as they bring the receiver to the ground.

IN PHASE ROUTE DRILL



Equipment: A football.



Purpose: To work on a DB's ability to mirror a receiver's route and stay in phase.



Setup: Have players pair off with a teammate and form a line, with the first pair stepping up onto the LOS, with the DB in trail technique right behind the receiver.

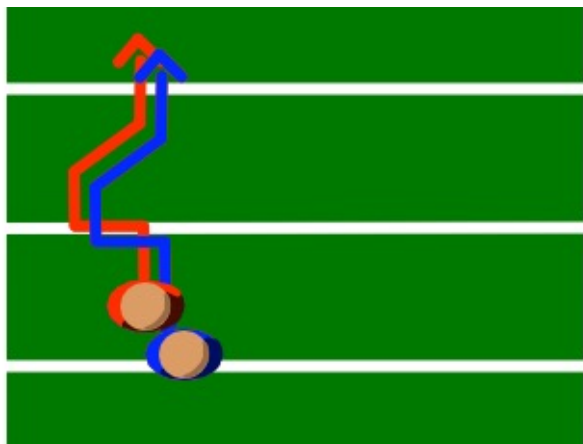


Diagram of players performing the In Phase Route Drill.



Defender mirroring the receiver and staying in phase as they run their route.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the receiver will begin to sprint downfield, and cycle through a series of predetermined routes.
2. The DB will stay close to the receiver, mirroring the routes as they run downfield and staying in phase and even in contact with receiver through the whole drill if possible.
3. Begin at 50% speed for the first few reps to let players get comfortable with the footwork before moving on to the full speed version of the drill.

COACHING TIPS

- Each rep we want to work on about 3 routes – usually we start with quick out, a post, and a corner route, giving our DB a good variety of looks and ensure they are comfortable reacting to the receiver and staying in phase going in a variety of directions.
- Emphasize the importance of staying close to the receiver and underneath the route, keeping between the receiver and the QB. Football is a game of inches, maybe even more so for defensive backs than any other position, as a few inches can often be the difference between a great defensive play and a blunder.

ZONE FLIP TECHNIQUE



Equipment: N/A



Purpose: To teach players the correct technique for soft zone coverage.



Setup: Have players pair off with a teammate and form a line, with the first pair stepping up with the WR on the LOS and the DB 2 yards inside and 6-8 yards back off the line.



DB backpedaling and keeping their butt to the sideline, getting ready to execute the zone flip technique.

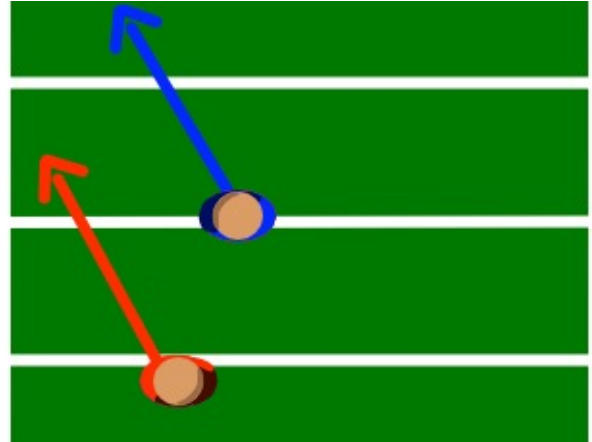


Diagram of players performing the Zone Flip Technique Drill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the WR will release off the line, moving outside to the sideline.
2. The DB will backpedal, keeping their eyes on the inside, eventually turning their butt to the sideline and looking over the inside shoulder as they squeeze the receiver out to the sideline.

COACHING TIPS

- The reason we align about 6-8 yards off the line is to not give away the coverage pre-snap to the QB – they won't be able to identify whether the DB is in loose man to man or zone coverage just by looking at their pre-snap positioning.
- In man-press coverage we take away the inside with the jam on the line, but in zone, we will take away the inside release simply from our alignment.
- When in zone, we want our DBs to be able to see the whole picture – they should be able to see both the receivers release and transition through their routes as well as the QB's eyes and shoulder. As they watch the routes develop and the QB's shoulder, they should be able to get and advantage and see where the ball is going, plant a foot and drive forward to make a play on the ball.
- One of the advantages of zone coverage is that since the DB has their eyes on the QB at the snap, they are in a much better position to help on a run or play to the inside, as they will have more awareness as to what is happening at the LOS than they would in a man scheme.

CORNER ZONE REACTION DRILL



Equipment: 1 football.



Purpose: To develop a DB's ability to read and react to the QB and multiple receivers when in Cover 3.



Setup: 2 receivers will step up on the LOS, with the DB in off zone alignment, 2 yards inside of the widest receiver and 6-8 yards off the LOS.

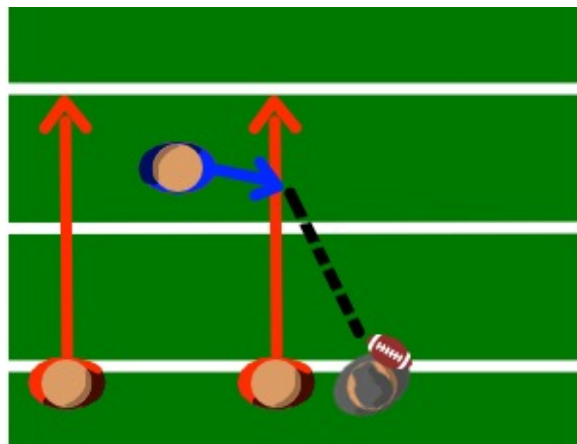


Diagram of Corner Zone Reaction Drill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. The coach will snap the ball and receivers will both run streak routes.
2. The DB will drop, using the zone flip technique and turning their butt to the sideline and keeping their eyes on the QB.
3. The QB will rotate their shoulders to one of the 2 receivers, tipping off the DB to where the pass is headed.
4. The DB will plant their backfoot and drive forward to make a play on the ball before it gets to the receiver.

COACHING TIPS

- For the purpose of thirds zone coverage, we define the area of responsibility for our outside corners as the sideline to the hash mark. We can also use this drill to work on a safety's ability to cover the middle third of the field in that same coverage – simply align the 2 receivers on the hash marks and the safety in the deep center field and run the same drill.
- The DB should be able to see the whole picture: the #1 receiver release on the inside, the #2 receiver release on the outside, and the QB.
- Emphasize the importance of keeping the ball in front of them – we don't want them turning backwards to break on the ball, they should be breaking forwards or to the side.

SAFETY ZONE REACTION DRILL



Advanced



Equipment: A football.



Purpose: To teach players the concepts of executing a Cover 3 defense in a game-like situation.



Setup: 3 receivers will spread out on the LOS – one wide left, one on the left hash, and one on the right hash. 2 corners will align themselves with the receivers, 2 yards inside and 6 yards off the LOS, and the safety will line up in the middle of the field approximately 8-10 yards off the LOS.

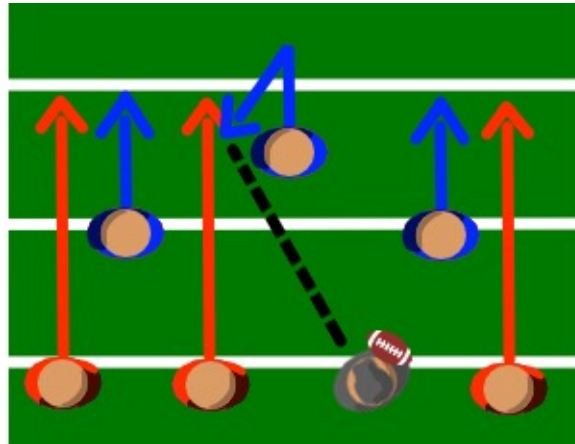


Diagram of Safety Zone Reaction Drill

INSTRUCTIONS

1. The coach will snap the ball and the receivers will all release, running streak routes downfield.
2. The DB's will keep their butts to the sideline and their eyes on the QB as they drop downfield with the receivers.
3. The coach will pick a target and rotate their shoulders and eyes to that receiver as they begin the throwing motion, indicating to the DB's where the pass is about to be thrown.
4. The DB's will break on the ball and make a play, either going for the interception or swatting the ball down to the ground.

COACHING TIPS

- Instill in the minds of the players that they don't have a man in this coverage – if the ball is thrown up the seam, we should have a natural double team happen as both the corner and safety converge on the ball as it is thrown to the receiver.