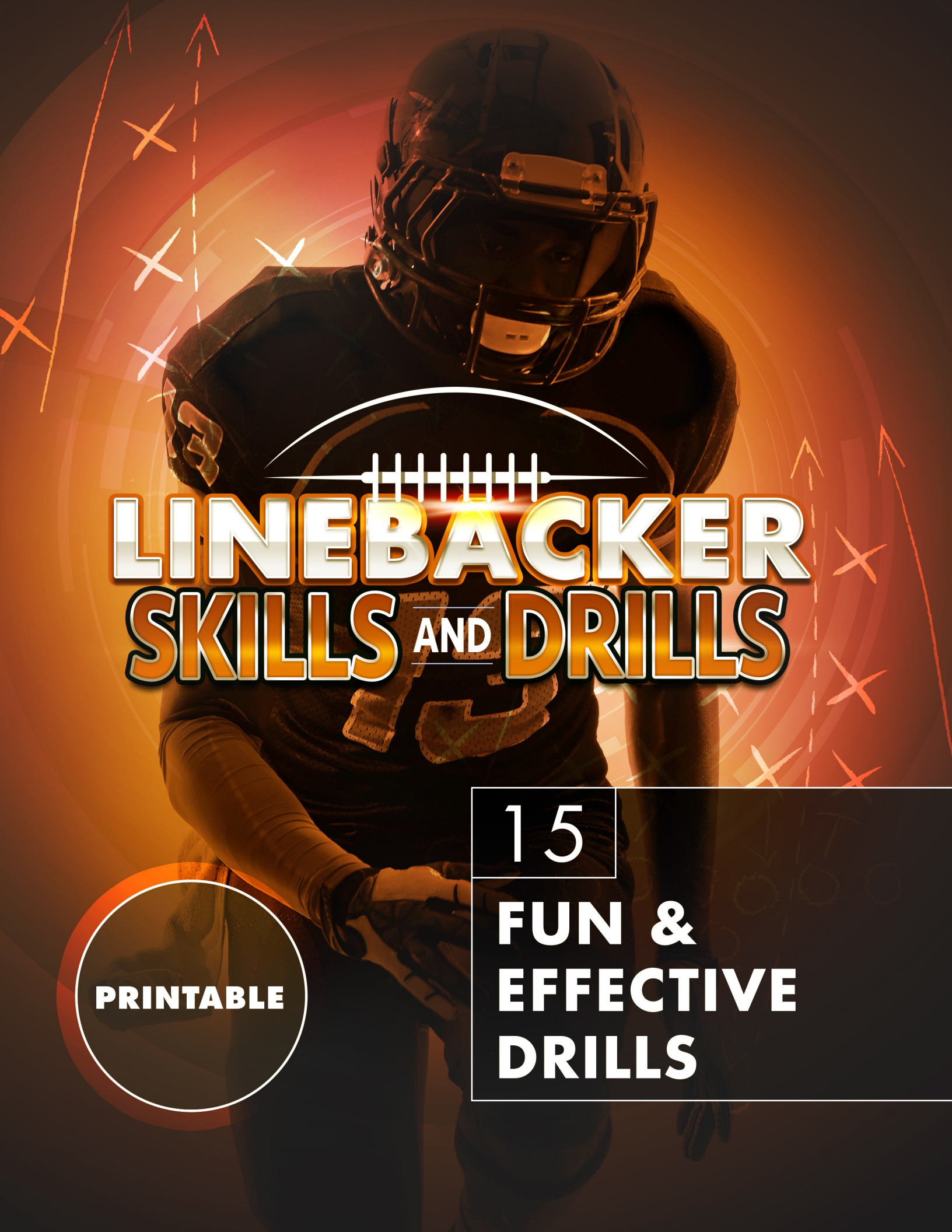


A football player in a black uniform and helmet is shown from the waist up, in a ready stance. The background is a warm orange and red gradient with faint circular patterns and dashed lines with 'X' marks, suggesting movement and strategy.

LINEBACKER SKILLS AND DRILLS

15

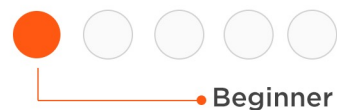
**FUN &
EFFECTIVE
DRILLS**

PRINTABLE

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LINEBACKER STANCE



Equipment: N/A



Setup: Players will spread out with about 5 yards between them.



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



Player getting in stance as coach evaluates.

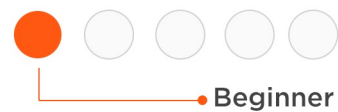
INSTRUCTIONS

1. One at a time, the coach will call each player forward and have them get into stance.
2. The players feet should be slightly closer together than shoulder width apart and their upper body relaxed, knees bent, hands out front, head up, and chest out.
3. The player should have their knees bent at a comfortable angle and their weight on their toes – this will form 'V' shapes at both their hips and knees.
4. After evaluating their stance, have them step back and move on to evaluating the next player, until every player has established a good linebacker stance.

COACHING TIPS

- The most important thing to stress is good footwork and good body position – if they are standing up straight with their arms out wide they will not only be less effective as a linebacker but expose themselves to an increased probability of getting injured.
- Emphasize the importance of keeping their toes pointed forward – if a player is spreading the feet out it will feel more comfortable, but will put them in a position where they need to take an extra step off the snap, slowing them down.

READ STEPS



Equipment: You will need 4 blocking shields and 4 cones.



Purpose: To eliminate false steps and teach players to move with speed and balance.



Setup: Spread the 4 cones out with about 5 yards between them and place a blocking shield in front of each one. The players will get in stance with their heels on the blocking shields.



Players lined up with heels flush to the blocking bags.



Players executing a read step to the right.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the players will all take a read step to the right.
2. They should take the first step with their right foot, not too wide, with an immediate gather step from their left foot, settling right back into their linebacker stance.
3. Have the players reset, and signal again – this time with the players moving to the left.
4. If you have multiple lines of players, have the first group of players head to the back and continue the drill with the next group.

COACHING TIPS

- By having the players line up on the bags with their heels flush, we will have a visual indicator if players are taking a 'false step'. This means the player is taking an unnecessary gather step to propel themselves forward, indicating that either the player isn't balanced in their stance, or that they are simply using sloppy footwork. We need to eliminate this as in a game of inches, one wrong step can make all the difference.
- If you have a second coach, it can be a good idea to have one coach focus on the upper body, and the other focus on the lower body, ensuring that they are using proper fundamentals from the ground up.

DIRECTIONAL DRILL



Equipment: You will need 4 blocking shields and 4 cones.



Purpose: To emphasize the importance of good footwork and keeping your eyes on the football.



Setup: Spread the 4 cones out with about 5 yards between them and place a blocking shield in front of each one. The players will get in stance with their heels on the blocking shields.

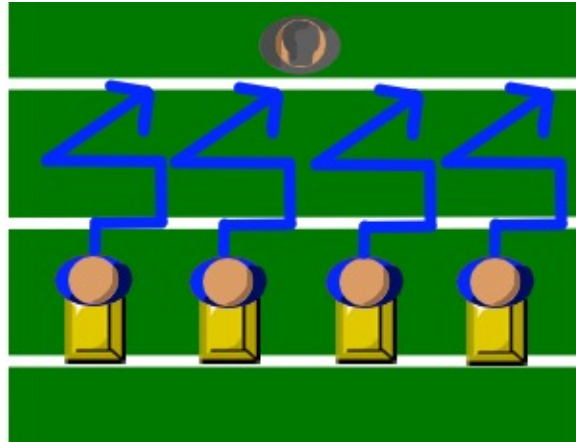


Diagram of Directional Drill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before the drill begins, indicate which direction the initial read step will be to.
2. On the coach's signal, the players will all take an initial read step to the right.
3. The coach will then point in a direction and the players will continue to move wherever the coach points.
4. After about 10 seconds, have them finish with a sprint past you, and bring the next group in.

COACHING TIPS

- When moving parallel to the LOS, the players should be shuffling, staying low, and making sure to never cross their feet – this goes for every direction, but is especially important when moving side to side.
- The key here is control – not speed. If players are performing the footwork correctly, they should be able to explode in any direction at a moments notice.
- Make sure to work on both lateral movement and moving at that 45 degree angle – however we will not be incorporating backwards movement into this drill.

EXPLOSION DRILL



Equipment: 2 blocking bags, 2 cones.



Setup: First 2 players in line will start with their heels flush on the bags. 2 teammates will stand a few yards in front of them.



Purpose: To emphasize the importance of good hand placement and driving with the feet.



Players in position to begin explosion drill with heels flush to blocking pads.



Players exploding forward and pushing their teammates up into the air.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the players will take a read step to the direction the coach has indicated.
2. They will then drive forward towards their teammate.
3. As they approach, the teammate will jump up into the air.
4. The linebackers should come in low and place both hands on the inside of the shoulder pads, exploding upwards with their hips and driving their teammate back and up into the air.
5. The linebackers will continue to drive their feet, keeping their teammate in the air for a few seconds as they drive them back.
6. Switch offense to defense and repeat.

COACHING TIPS

- This is not a drill where we are working on speed or toughness – we are focusing on developing the correct fundamentals, driving these movements into their muscle memory so that when they are tackling they already have a strong base.
- Remember if your feet stop – so does your momentum – emphasize the importance of continuing to drive their feet all the way through the finish.

LATERAL EXPLOSION DRILL



Equipment: 3 blocking bags.



Purpose: To get players comfortable with exploding forward out of lateral movement with the correct technique.



Setup: 3 blockers will form a line and spread out with a few yards between them and a blocking pad in hand. Linebacker running the drill will start offset to one side, about 5 yards from the first blocker.

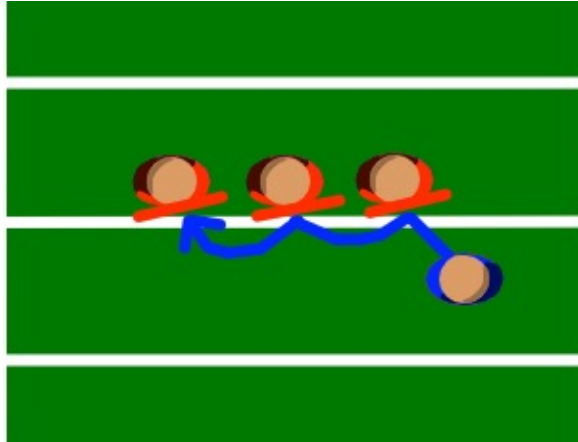


Diagram of Lateral Explosion Drill.



Player reacting to ball carrier stepping up and driving forward to wrap them up.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the linebacker will begin to move laterally until they are in line with the first blocker.
2. The blocker will step up, and the linebacker will drop their hips, explode forward and punch with both hands on the bag.
3. They will then recoil a few steps and continue to move laterally until they get to the next blocker.
4. They will repeat and continue to move laterally until they hit the final blocker, before recoiling once more and sliding out into space, with their head up looking for the ball.

COACHING TIPS

- You can run this drill with as many or as few blockers as you like: anywhere from 2-5 is a good range.
- Players should be exploding forward and lifting, using the same technique we worked on in the explosion drill – we don't want to see players lazily slapping bags and moving on.
- The recoil after the punch is key, as this allows the linebacker to maintain their freedom of movement and stay away from all the blockers and bodies on the LOS and in good position to make a tackle.

LATERAL EXPLOSION DRILL (CONT.)



Equipment: 3 blocking bags.



Purpose: To teach players how to deal with a blocker attempting to cut off their path as they move laterally with the ball.



Setup: 3 blockers will form a line and spread out with a few yards between them and a blocking pad in hand. Linebacker running the drill will start offset to one side, about 5 yards from the first blocker.



Coach demonstrating the forearm shiver technique.

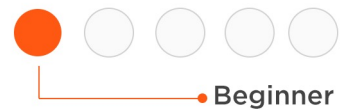
INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the linebacker will begin to move laterally until they are yard or two away from the first blocker.
2. The blocker will step up, and the linebacker will get low and lock their inside arm at a 45-degree angle, leading with the forearm to initiate contact. They will then shed the blocker and continue to move laterally.
3. The linebacker will continue to shuffle to the outside before repeating the same action on the next blocker.
4. They will repeat and continue to move laterally until they hit the final blocker, before recoiling once more and sliding out into space, with their head up looking for the ball.

COACHING TIPS

- As the defender tries to cut off the linebacker, the linebacker should approach at a 45-degree angle and lead with the inside forearm. The key to an effective forearm shiver is actually in the off-hand – as the player makes contact with the forearm shiver, they will use their outside hand to push the blocker away and continue to move laterally without any obstruction.
- As a variation, you can also have the linebacker drive through the last blocker, with them leaping up in the air and the linebacker driving through them as we saw in the original explosion drill.

SPEED DRILL (LATERAL)



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



Purpose: To work on speed, agility, footwork, and balance.



Setup: The first 4 players will step up and stand perpendicular to the line, all facing the same direction.



Players in line chopping their feet.



Players hopping across to the other side of the line on coach's command.

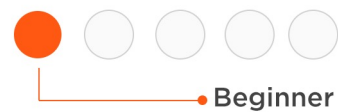
INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the players will begin to chop their feet, moving them up and down in place as quickly as they can.
2. On the next whistle, the players will take a quick sidestep over the line and immediately continue to chop their feet in place.
3. Each time the coach whistles, the players will step across the line, chopping their feet for the entirety of the drill.
4. After about 30 seconds to a minute, end the rep and bring in the next group of players.

COACHING TIPS

- Don't let the players cheat and get lazy with their stance – the whole idea of this drill is to take the fundamentals we have established and learning how to move and react quickly while staying in that fundamentally sound linebacker stance.
- Change up the rhythm of the whistle – we want to make sure players are reacting to the whistle and not predicting it. This will also ensure they are always stepping across while keeping their feet shoulders width apart, hips low, and their hands in a ready position.

QUARTER TURNS



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



Setup: Each player will start next to a cone, all facing the same direction.



Purpose: To work on footwork and agility as well as concentration and ability to quickly process information.



Players in line chopping their feet.



Players making a quarter turn clockwise and continuing to chop their feet.

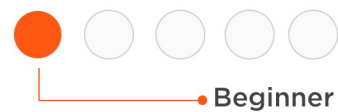
INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before starting, indicate in which direction the players will begin rotating.
2. On the coach's whistle, the players will begin to chop their feet.
3. On the next whistle, the players will all rotate 90-degrees and continue to chop their feet.
4. Each time the coach whistles, the player will rotate another 90 degrees.
5. If the coach whistles twice, the players will change directions and rotate the opposite way.
6. Continue for about 30 seconds to a minute, then rotate the next group in.

COACHING TIPS

- If you don't have a whistle, you can also use a signal like "HIT!", to indicate that the ball has been snapped. If that's the case, instead of whistling twice to indicate a change of direction, you can simply yell out "REVERSE!".
- Keep an eye on their stance – as they get tired they may begin to straighten out or get sloppy with their feet or hands – emphasize the importance of practicing how you're going to play. They need to develop these habits now so that in a real game when they are exhausted it is already second nature.

JUMP THE CONES



Equipment: Spread out 4 cones in a straight line with about 2-3 yards between them.



Setup: Players will form a line at the first cone.



Purpose: To work on explosion and balance.



Player jumping over the cones while keeping their body compact.

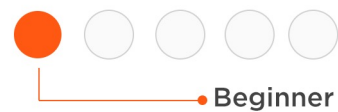
INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the first player in line will jump over the first cone.
2. They should emphasize exploding off the ground, bringing their feet up and over the obstacle, and using their arms to drive themselves up into the air.
3. After the first player in line has jumped a cone or two, the coach will signal, queueing the next player in line to begin.
4. Repeat until all players have gone through the course multiple times.

COACHING TIPS

- Feel free to swap out different objects for the cones, and use up to 10 obstacles for the players to jump over – as long as were emphasizing the importance of exploding over the obstacle, bringing their feet and hands up with them.
- Don't let the players cheat by spreading their feet or simply bunny hopping through the drill – while they may need to take a 'gather hop' after landing before jumping over the next cone, they should be exploding over the cones and keeping their body tight and compact in the air and on landing.

SHUTTLE DRILL



Equipment: 3 cones, a stopwatch.



Purpose: To work on agility, speed, and balance.



Setup: Place two cones 5 yards apart, with the player starting in the middle. The 3rd cone will be 5 yards down to the right.

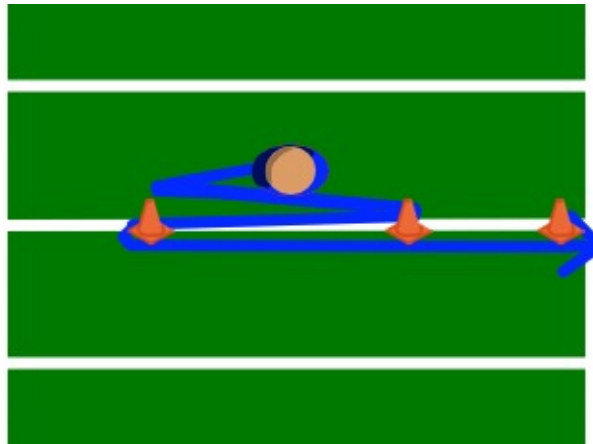


Diagram of Shuttle Drill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. The first player in line will start in the middle of 2 cones, chopping their feet.
2. The player will sprint to the cone to their right and touch it.
3. The coach will start the stopwatch on the first movement of the player.
4. The player will then sprint back to the cone on their left and touch it.
5. They will then sprint back to the first cone they touched and touch it one more time, before sprinting back across and through to the final cone.
6. The next player in line will step up and continue the drill. Once every player has gone once, we will go through a second time to see if anyone can improve on their original score.

COACHING TIPS

- Players are responsible for remembering their score between each round, with the goal of being able to at the very least equal if not better their score the first time around. If the player isn't able to at least match their score, they get one more chance – if they still can't beat that time, they have to do 5 push-ups.

SHED, SHED, WRAP DRILL



Equipment: 3 blockers with pads, a cone (or sideline), players with their helmets on.



Setup: 3 blockers will get in line behind each other, with about 5 yards between them. The linebacker will start offset to the inside of the first blocker, on the LOS. Place the cone 8-10 yards to the outside of the ball carrier on the LOS.



Purpose: Players will work through a series of drills designed to improve their ball handling and ball security.



Player shedding the second block and setting their eyes on the ball carrier.

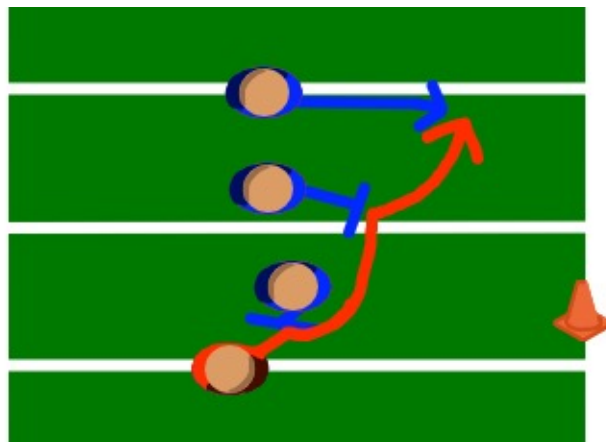


Diagram of Shed, Shed, Wrap Drill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the first blocker will step inside and attempt to seal the linebacker.
2. The linebacker will use a shiver and shed the block, moving onto the next blocker, who will also slide laterally and attempt to seal the linebacker inside.
3. The linebacker will again use the shiver to shed the block and move onto the ball carrier, who will be attempting to beat the linebacker to the cone.
4. The linebacker will then wrap the ball carrier and drive them back a few steps, before releasing and ending the rep. Rotate positions and repeat.

COACHING TIPS

- To start, we will go at 50-75% speed to get players familiar with the drill, but once they are comfortable, we want to go full speed and have the ball carrier try to beat the linebacker to the cone.
- Make sure players are keeping their heads out of the play and using shoulder tackling technique.
- As a variation, we can also bring the cone in much closer – say 5 yards to the outside, to emulate a goal line situation rather than a sweep to the outside.

DOWN THE LINE WRAP DRILL



Equipment: 3 blockers with pads, players with helmets on.



Purpose: Players will work through a series of drills designed to improve their ball handling and ball security.



Setup: 3 blockers with pads will stand in a line with about 2-3 yards between them. The linebacker will begin 2-3 yards to the right of the first blocker, facing them, and the coach will stand behind the linebacker.

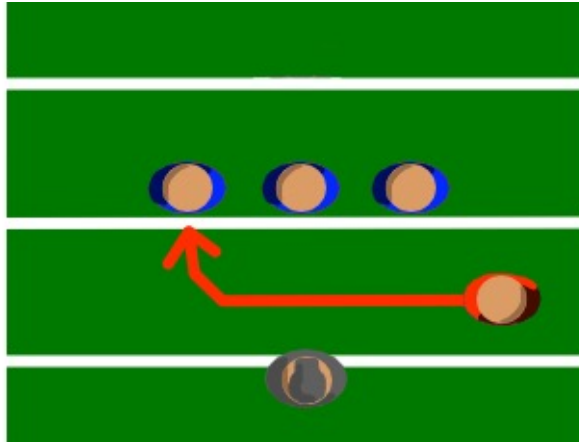


Diagram of Down the Line Wrap Drill.



Player making a safe shoulder tackle on the ball carrier.

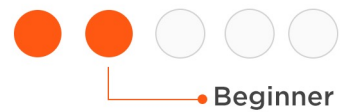
INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the linebacker will begin to shuffle laterally.
2. The coach will hold up a number from 1-3. Whichever of the 3 offensive players numbers has been called will step up.
3. The linebacker must react, drive forward, and wrap up the offensive player.
4. Rotate and repeat.

COACHING TIPS

- The focus here is on good footwork, tackling with the shoulder and keeping the head out of the play as they wrap up the ball carrier – we aren't worried about hitting hard or taking the ball carrier to the ground. This drill is about developing solid fundamentals.

W DRILL



Equipment: 5 cones.



Purpose: To work on a linebacker's ability to move fluidly in pass coverage.



Setup: Spread the cones out in a W pattern, with about 5 yards between in each cone. Players form a line at one end of the W.



Player dropping the elbow back and moving downfield.

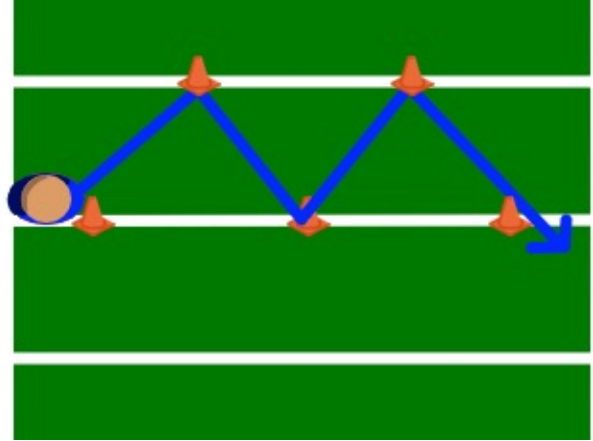


Diagram of W drill.

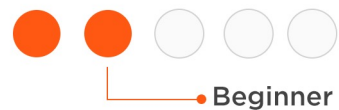
INSTRUCTIONS

1. The first player in line will start facing upfield.
2. On the coach's signal, the player will turn the arm back and drive their momentum backwards, keeping their eyes down field.
3. When they approach the second cone, they will take one shuffle step, then break forwards to the third cone.
4. They will then drop the elbow and sprint back to the fourth cone, maintaining their vision on the QB, before finishing the rep by sprinting through the fifth and final cone.
5. Once the first player in line has reached the second cone, the coach should signal for the next player in line to begin, until all players have run through, at which point we repeat the drill going back down the other way.

COACHING TIPS

- Emphasize the importance of staying low, dropping the elbow and getting the arm turned as they turn back while keeping their eyes on the QB.
- This is to simulate the linebacker moving with their assignment and reacting to either the route or the QB and breaking on the play.

ANGLE DRILL



Equipment: 3 cones.



Purpose: To teach linebackers how to get a good initial drop off the snap when in coverage.



Setup: Set up the 1st cone with a second about 5 yards back and offset to the side, with a 3rd cone another 5 yards back in line with the first cone. 1st player in line will start at the cone, facing away from the others.



Players executing the angle drill while keeping their eyes on the QB.

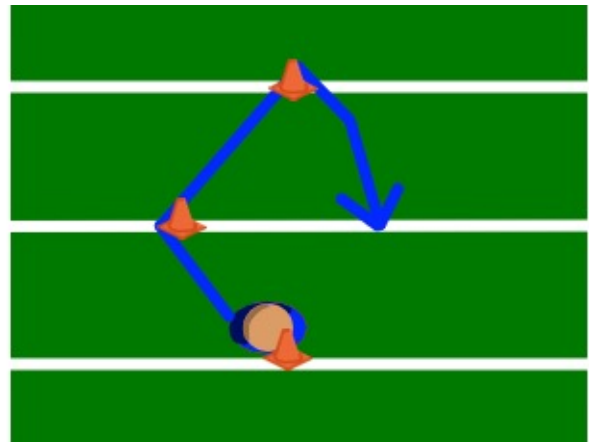


Diagram of Angle Drill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the player will explode backwards, pushing out with their arm and rotating their hips as they drop back, keeping their eyes upfield and staying in control.
2. When they reach the second cone, they will pivot and continue to drop back, still keeping their eyes on the QB.
3. When players reach the third cone they will drive forward for a few steps before returning to the back of the line.

COACHING TIPS

- This is a great pass coverage drill that lends itself to not only teaching the fundamentals but developing speed and awareness in the passing game. When players are more comfortable with their footwork and positioning on the field, they are more comfortable making reads, reacting to the offense and play more instinctually.
- Emphasize the importance of driving the elbow back, staying low as they open the hips and move downfield and keeping the eyes upfield.
- It's important to flip this drill and make sure the players are comfortable dropping back in both directions.

3 LINE BALL DRILL



Equipment: 3 cones, a football.



Purpose: To develop a linebackers ability to attack the ball in the air when in pass coverage.



Setup: Spread the 3 cones out in a line, each 5 yards apart from the other. Have a player stand in front of each cone. The coach will stand 5-10 yards in front of the middle line with a football.

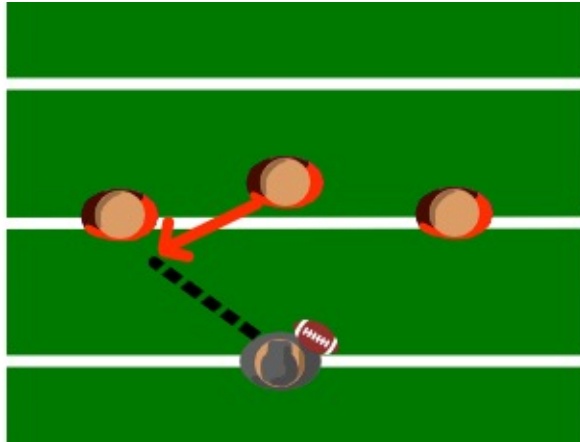


Diagram of 3 Line Ball Drill.



Player breaking on the ball and swatting it down with their inside hand.

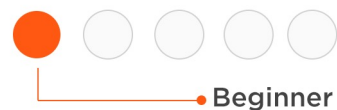
INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the coach's signal, the player in the middle we begin to chop their feet.
2. The coach will then throw a pass to either the left or right line.
3. The linebacker must drive forward and break on the ball, swatting the ball down with their inside hand.
4. After each rep, have the players rotate over one line to their right, with any extra players coming in from their left.

COACHING TIPS

- Players should be reaching across to swat the ball down with their inside arm, as this will allow them to make a play on the ball but also tackle the receiver if they are somehow able to make the catch.
- You can use a deflated football to really emphasize that players get the slap on the ball, with some even maybe being able to make a play on it catch with one hand – but the first priority is making sure the receiver can't make the catch.

HAND DRILL



Equipment: A football for each pair of players.



Purpose: To work on concentration, reaction speed, and hand-eye coordination.



Setup: Players will pair off and stand 5 yards apart.



Players paired off performing the Hand Drill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. One player will start with the ball and begin passing it back and forth between their hands.
2. They will then call out either right or left and throw the ball to their teammate.
3. Their teammate must swat the ball with the corresponding hand.
4. They will then switch from passer to receiver.

COACHING TIPS

- As players get more comfortable with the drill, you can have them move closer together, as this will really test their reaction time.
- This is also a great drill for two-way players, as it gives them a chance to work on their ball skills and improve their ability on both sides of the ball.
- If the player can catch the ball – go for it! But make sure they are either swatting it down or catching it – we don't want them bobbling the ball up in the air.