

Georgia Military College's

Devastating 3-5 Defense

From: American Football Coaches Association

*By Bert Williams, Head Football Coach
Paul Purvis, Defensive Coordinator
Taylor Burks, Linebackers Coach*

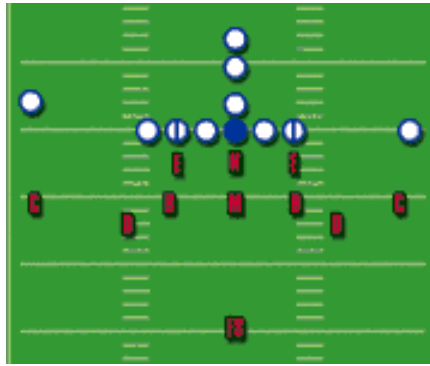
Following the 2000 season, our staff met to discuss what we needed to do to give our team a chance to play for something special in 2001. We had just finished the season 7-3 with the #2 ranked defense in the NJCAA, but we knew we had the talent returning to do better in 2001. One of the things we decided to do was to revamp our defense and change to a 3-5 scheme. While some may question the sanity of rebuilding a defense that finished #2 in the nation, we had sound reasons for making the change. After several discussions with Defense Coordinator Scot Sloan (now at Georgia Southern University), we made the change. We believed the 3-5 scheme made our recruiting efforts easier, increased adaptability to what offenses presented us, and allowed us the opportunity to bring better pressure and create better opportunities for our offense.

Finding defensive linemen seems to be the yearly challenge for colleges of all levels. Signing enough defensive linemen to meet our needs got tougher every year and, conversely, we always seemed to have a larger number of linebacker, outside linebacker and safety-type players to recruit. There are not nearly as many high schools with 6'4", 290 lb. defensive linemen who can run as there are high schools with players in that 6'0"-6'2", 200-230 lb. range who can run and make plays. Switching to the 3-5 scheme reduced the number of defensive linemen we had to recruit and allowed us to take advantage of the larger pool of talent found at the various linebacker positions. We were able to place more speed on the field, and that was a tremendous boost to our defense.

The 3-5 scheme also provided us the opportunity to expand on our pressure-oriented defense. The alignment alone caused problems for opponents blocking schemes, and the seemingly endless ways to bring pressure kept opponents on their heels throughout the 2001 season. The additional speed brought to the field through the change in personnel added to the impact of the various pressure schemes we used. Also, the greater number of DB and linebacker types on the field made it easier for our defense to adjust to trips formations and motions without unbalancing our defensive front. The obvious question at this point is "was it successful?"

Through the efforts and consistent belief in the benefits of the 3-5 scheme, our defensive staff crafted a unit that was second to none in the 2001 season. In fact, our defense set an all-time NJCAA record for Total Defense with 67.6 yards of offense allowed per game. Additionally, we only gave up five touchdowns and no field goals during the regular

season, and went on to Championship in 2001. all of our expectations we believe strongly in



win the NJCAA National The defense met and exceeded in 2001 and, needless to say,

its merits. The following will detail how we installed the defense and a couple of the key coaching points we taught our defensive personnel.

Base Alignment

Keys to Execution

Constant Movement and Pressure

Coverage Combinations

Base Alignment

In the 3-5 defense the alignment places our Defensive Ends head up over the offensive tackles and our Nose Guard aligned over the center. The linemen are taught to attack the backfield and get flat to the ball. The defensive lines play allows linebacker to run and make plays. The linebackers are stacked behind defensive linemen. Our outside backers, dog safeties, are aligned off the end man on the line of scrimmage. The dogs usually are given the freedom to move between an area of 3-5 yards outside the end man on line of scrimmage and 3-8 yards away from the line of scrimmage. They must be in the correct position when the play starts. The Free Safety is behind the Mike linebacker at 10-12 yards deep. The corners are aligned 7 yards off the ball over the widest man to their man to their side of the field. The following is the basic alignment for our defense (Diagram 1).

Keys to Execution

The key to success for the 3-5 defense is the ability to stunt and blitz from all areas of the defense. Based on the alignment in figure 1, we were able to move the linemen in a direction determined by formations, down and distance, and the offense's favorite plays. The defensive line responsibilities are made simple, based on our philosophy that we must control the line of scrimmage. We make playing defense line simple so that they can be aggressive in their attack. Our defensive ends and nose guards are very quick and are seldom asked to take on a base block. The movement of the defensive linemen requires offenses to account for them. Based on this thought, an attempt to block our defensive linemen must be made by two or more offensive linemen. The defensive linemen move in the same direction accordingly with the stunt and blitz called to allow linebackers to hit

the correct gaps.

We drill and constantly stress the option responsibilities in every blitz and stunt we do. We work on pad level in blitzing, because a high pad level allows offenses to disrupt the blitz. The linebackers must be able to attack the line of scrimmage with low pad level and be ready to redirect to the recognized play. To recognize the play we run a Key Drill. This is an important part of our practice where the linebackers learn to recognize formations, sets and plays the opponents run. The important coaching point is for the linebacker to understand where the defensive line is stunting and where they will fit on each play. The linebacker's ability to read the play fast and then attack helps us to make plays in the backfield. The following is a key drill we use to help linebackers with play recognition. (Diagrams 2,3,4)



Diagram 2. - VS. ISO

Mike - fit inside/out to the football

Left Bat - attack, keep outside arm free

Right Bat - slow read for cut back, fit with the noseguard

Left Dog - buzz feet and be ready to fit inside or outside as determined by the ball location

Right Dog - slow read for cut back

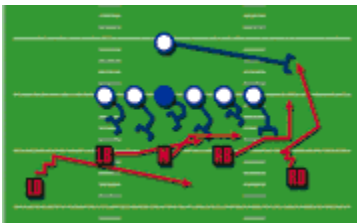


Diagram 3. VS. SWEEP

Mike - fast flow - go now and stay inside/out on the football

Left Bat - slow read away fit with the noseguard for cut back

Right Bat - fit off the end man on the line of scrimmage

Left Dog - slow read for cut back

Right Dog - attack ball and turn everything back inside

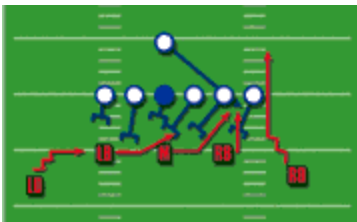


Diagram 4. VS. OPTION

The noseguard, Mike, Right Bat and Right End must handle dive and QB

Mike - read inside out, dive, QB, pitch

Left Bat - slow read fit with the nose for cut back

Right Bat - attack line of scrimmage QB (Mike, Nose, End have Dive)

Left Dog - slow read for cut back

Right Dog - buzz feet on line of scrimmage until football location is determined, then to pitch

Free Safety - has dive, QB to pitch

The Dog safeties are aligned where the Key Drill is vital for them to be active in the running game and pass coverage. These players are the most versatile on the field because they are asked to cover man-to-man, support the run, blitz and zone drop into coverage.

The most important element to executing the defense is not asking your players to do something they are not used to doing. Often times, we try to outsmart an offense and ask players to do many different things. We stayed simple with our approach to this defense

by letting defensive linemen attack, linebackers and Dog safeties blitz, and the corners along with the free safeties cover. The attacking style makes the defense a challenge for offenses and fun for our players.

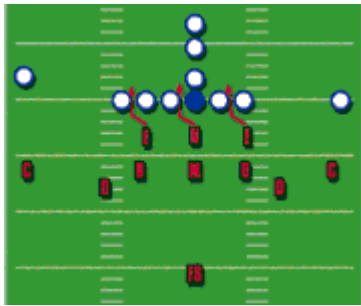


Diagram 5. Slant Left

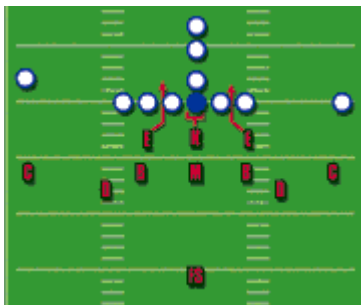


Diagram 6. Pinch

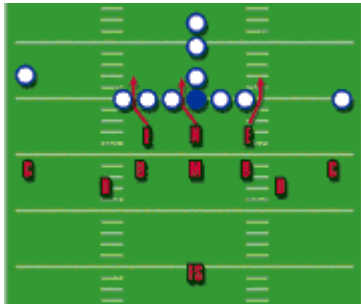


Diagram 7. Up

Dog safeties, Free safety, Bats and Mike moving back and forth, side to side and from gap to gap at different depths. When we are doing this correctly, it looks like organized chaos during the snap count. We constantly remind those Prowling to not take themselves out of responsibility.

Our slants are very basic and correspond with our stunts. We will slant our Ends and Nose right or left (Diagram 5), pinch (Diagram 6) and up (Diagram 7).

The biggest coaching point that we have picked up with this defense is to not just teach where to stunt but rather teach how to stunt. How to fight through, seeing the ball, and how to redirect are all elements of how to stunt. Where to go is only part of it, but how to take on the different levels during a play is even more important.

Constant Movement and Pressure

One of the elements that the 3-5 scheme can offer is mixing up the depth of who is and who is not going on a stunt, and another element is in slanting the defensive line. The Dog safeties, Free safety, Bats and Mike can also prowl back and forth between different areas with the appearance of a stunt.

The different depths that we can pressure are from 1. Base Alignment, 2. Cheat, 3. Show It and 4. Walk It Up. In Base Alignment we are keying the ball ready to go on a predetermined path from normal depths associated with that position. With Cheat, the people on the stunt will simply move their alignment up to half to distance that would be normal in Base. Show It means for the people involved in the stunt to line up in the stunt before the quarterback is fully under center. Finally, Walk It Up means for everyone involved in that particular stunt to start off in normal alignment and ease toward their stunt during the offensive cadence.

What these depths offer us are different speeds of attack and game plans. In the first game we might Show It, with all stunts knowing that will be on the film for the next opponent. For the second game we might Walk It Up, and then the third game Cheat with all stunts.

Another way we stress the offense with our stunt packages is by Prowling. Our players love to do this and take a lot of pride in disguising. Prowling is simply the

The second coaching point is to make sure each player knows their responsibility for option in all of the stunts.

Coverage Combinations

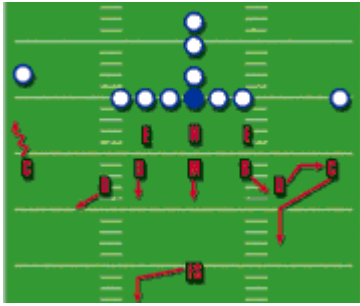


Diagram 8. Cover 2

The cornerbacks are asked to do one thing and do it very well. They must be able to cover the side receivers. Whether we are in zone or man to man the corners cover and support late on the run.

As with most defenses, the Free Safety must run with the defense. He must know who is blitzing, where the slant is going, and where he fits with the call. The Free Safety allows us to get the ninth man in on the run game and allows us to pressure with eight players.

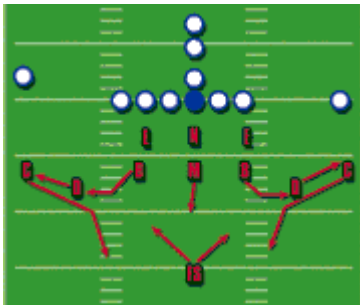


Diagram 9. Cover Two Robber

In the 3-5 we have found an unlimited amount of what you can do coverage-wise. If your team is a Cover 2 program, then a Rotating Cover 2 can be used (Diagram 8) or an invested Cover 2 with a Robber (Diagram 9). We have experimented some with 1/4 1/4 1/2's (Diagram 10). The coverages that we use the most are variations of Man and Cover Three.

When we are stunting the Dog and Bat on the same side we use One Roll. In One Roll the Covers have #1, the free safety will roll down and cover #2 on the side that the Dog and Bat are stunting. The Bat not going on a stunt and the Mike will take #3. On the opposite side of the stunt, the Dog will have #2 man (Diagram 11). In this stunt it is crucial that the Dog on the blitz attack at the second level for containment and pitch. The Bat is attacking at the first level and has quarterback on option.

If we are stunting our Bats and Mike, then we will run Cover Zero. Cover Zero simply says that the offense has five eligible receivers and we have five defensive backs. The Corners have #1, the Dogs have #2 and the Free Safety has #3 (Diagram 12).

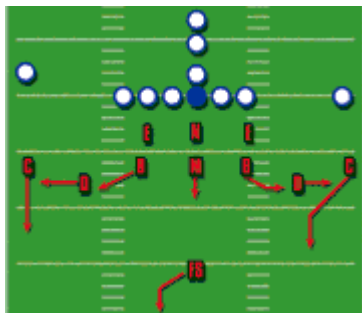


Diagram 10. Cover 1/4 1/4 1/2's

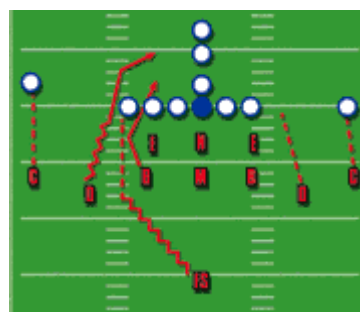


Diagram 11. One Roll

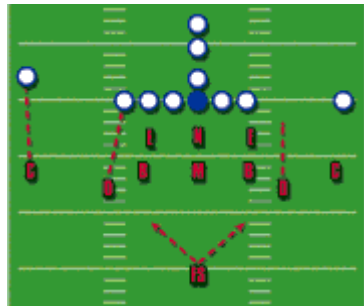


Diagram 12. Cover Zero

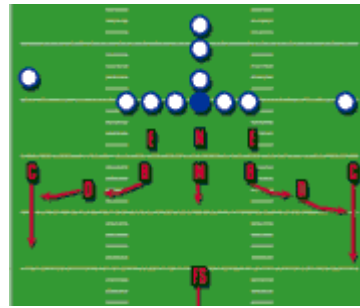


Diagram 13. Cover Three

The zone package we run comes out of a three deep principle in Cover Three. The basic rules are the Corners and Free Safety have deep 1/3's, the Dogs have curl/flat, the Bats have hook/curl and the Mike has the middle hole (Diagram 13). We will also roll our Cover three responsibilities so that we can add zone pressure packages.

Raising The Bar

With the 2001 team winning a National Championship and setting a national record, we know that the 2002 team will have to answer with success. One of the ways we are challenging the defensive unit is by using The Three Levels. Level 1 consists of alignment, assignment, stance and first step. This is the defensive player's job and he must be great at this level to be on the field. In our film studies over the years we have seen that a whopping percentage of the mistakes by a player could all be traced to poor first step and poor stance.

Level II consists of taking on a guard pull, breaking on the ball, taking on the second blocker, anything that happens after Level I. This is the level that we are putting an exclamation point in Spring Training and Summer Camp. The body position that the player is in during Level II will determine how they play the guard pull, break on the ball or take on the second blocker. In taking on the guard pull, is the defensive player too high? Are we taking on the guard late, allowing the running back to run inside or early, placing the running back bouncing outside? If we know where we are during Level II and how to set it up, then we will earn a lot of Level III. This is done at every position on defense.

Level III is the big hit or as Ronnie Lott says, "The Woo Lick", the interception, the caused fumble, picking up the fumble or a perfect fundamental solo tackle. These are the rewards of that play, and we want each player to increase their chances of making the reward happen. The only way a player can make Level III is by being great at Level II. The only way a player can be great at Level II is by being great at Level I. Using this philosophy has really challenged us as coaches to make our drills meet the demands of The Three Levels. Our players are challenged in their drill work to get better at Level II and are ready to take that to team periods and thus to the game field.