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**Defensive
Installation
Manual**

eBook

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Defensive Installation Manual

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Time For a Change	p. 3
Step 1: Make an Honest Evaluation of Your Athletes	p. 4
Step 2: Evaluate the Teams You Play Against	p. 9
Step 3: Know Your Own Strength	p. 10
Step 4: Choosing the Right Defense for Your Team	p. 12
Step 5: Learning the In's and Out's of Your Base Defense	p. 15
Step 6: Attacking the Offense with Multiple Fronts and Blitzes	p. 19
Step 7: Creating Your Coverage Package to Stop the Pass	p. 22
Step 8: Preparing to Make Adjustments to Your Defense	p. 24
Resources	p. 25

Introduction: Time for a Change

Why Write this eBook?

Installing a new defense in your football program can be a daunting task. There's so much to consider. Is this the right move for your kids? Will they buy into it? Does your staff really buy into it, and more importantly, do they really understand it?

I've been through a few defensive changes. Through job movements and changes in kids and philosophy, I've been a part of four different defensive schemes in the past four seasons.

Every defense works, if it is coached properly. Your kids will buy into any defensive scheme if you are passionate about it. So the pressure is on you, to pick the right scheme, learn it inside and out, then sell and teach it to your kids.

Preparation for Success

When you decide that it is time for a change, whether coming into a new situation or changing personnel on your team, you must study from every possible angle. Be meticulous in the way that you look at your kids, your options, your new scheme, and the way you will be teaching it.

What you draw on paper will be important, but not nearly as important as what you say and do with your kids. Prepare not only the scheme, but how you can get it across. Prepare your drills. Prepare your assistants. Prepare to have difficulties and prepare to make adjustments.

Every Detail is Important

You can't be too anal about preparing to change your defense. We're going to cover in deep detail every aspect of a scheme change. I'm going to give you a sort of check list to follow over the course of the next 9 months up to the opening kick-off.

And yes, you need to get started right now. There is too much research to do if you want to make a change, and do it right. There are too many details to wait.

If you are getting started a little late, that is okay. If a change needs to be made, now is the time to do it. But you're going to have to really hunker down and make this thing happen. If you are in charge, call up your guy's wives and apologize. They are going to be missing for a while.

Do you Really Need a Change

Make sure that the change is the best thing for your team. It may be that tweaks are a better approach. Or a more controlled change, rather than sweeping new installation.

Several teams I've seen have made the 3-5-3 Defense their 3rd & Long defense for a season, while still using their traditional 4-4 or 5-2 Defense on other downs. The next season, they simply made the 3-5-3 Defense their base.

Doing this makes it easy. You can experience running the defense, calling it, and solving problems with it, but you've got old faithful there for you too. And when you make the change the next season, you are just highlighting a different part of your package, not changing.

Step 1: Make an Honest Evaluation of Your Athletes

Speed is the Key

Nothing makes your defense better or worse like speed. Fast defenses are just plain better. But is it 40 times that you need to put on the field?

Evaluating your defense for speed is going to take more than a stop watch. You need guys that play fast. And there are a number of factors that go into playing fast.

1. *Straight Line Speed:* Kids with quick 40 yard dash times are fast. They are fast in a straight line. Now, you need guys to be fast in a straight line. So this is a major determining factor.
2. *Change of Direction Speed:* On defense, we're reacting most of the time. We see what is happening and we move to the ball carrier. And he is a shifty little guy. Your defenders have to be able to change direction quickly and get going again.
3. *Confidence and Simplicity:* If you give your kids too much to think about, you are going to slow them down. Most kids want to please you, so if you know they're moving slower than they should be, there are two possible reasons. They are confused or lazy. Most of them are confused. Keep your defense simple so that your kids can be confident.
4. *Quick Reads:* We are chasing a ball carrier, ultimately. But there are a lot of other keys on the field that can tell your defenders where the ball is going. If kids have reads that are clear and easy to understand, they can

get moving faster. Great reads make all of the difference in your defensive speed.

Steps to Evaluating Team Speed

Make an honest evaluation of your team speed using every piece of information you can get your hands on. Use stop watches, film, head to head competitions, and anything else you can find.

First, gather the traditional speed measures. Time your kids in the 40 yard dash. If you have a lot of 4.6 forty guys, then you've got speed. You can stop now. For the rest of us, analyze those times and see if you've got straight line speed.

Run your kids through a shuttle drill and some other change of direction drills. Create football-specific drills that can be timed, and see how your team measures up with speed when changing directions.

Evaluate the football intelligence of your kids. How have they picked up on what you've done in the past? Has confusion been a long-standing problem with these guys, and if so why? Your teaching (or the previous staff), or their intelligence?

Finally, sit down and watch the fastest team in your area on film. You know that one team that feels like they have 13 or 14 guys on the field every snap. Watch their game, at least a half. See what they are doing and how they are doing it. See how they get off the ball, how they change directions, how they break down and tackle.

Now put in a film of your team from last season. How do you measure up? Are your guys playing under water? Are they flying around and just missing? By watching your film

immediately after watching their film, you can see how your guys measure up. By the way, do not watch your game against them. You're too emotionally involved in that one and you'll end up criticizing your players rather than watching theirs.

Honest Evaluation Of Team Speed

1. Time Your Straight Line Speed
2. Time Your Change of Direction
3. Evaluate Team Football Intelligence
4. Watch Film of the Fastest Team
5. Watch Film of Your Team

Team Speed Analysis

One of the most common reasons that teams change defensive philosophy is to get more speed on the field. Do you have more speed you need to get on the field? Or do you already have enough spots for all of your team speed?

When you determine the type of speed you have, you can use it to make a decision. If you have straight line speed, but have had trouble with kids understanding how to read and react, stop asking them to. Use simple reads and get your guys downhill.

If your players are intelligent, but not very fast, you will want to use their quick reactions and ability to read an offense to get an extra step.

A big key is watching the film of the fastest team and of your team. Were the fast kids just fast, or were they rolling seemingly before the snap? In other words, was it just 11 athletes on the field, or did they really read it and know what to do?

Why did your kids not get going that fast? Was it mental or physical? And is the alignment of your players going to really change whether they react faster?

Look at the effort and angles to the ball. Team speed is often about hustle, and hustle out of all 11 guys. If you are making a lot of solo tackles, and they're making gang tackles from sideline to sideline, no new scheme is going to fix that. You have to change the way you coach pursuit and passion for getting to the football.

Make an honest evaluation of your team speed, why it is not where it needs to be, and what can be done to make it better. You will be better prepared to make a change, and make the right one.

If you have finished evaluating speed and found out you don't have any, don't worry. Get to work on learning how to coach up your team speed. And get your kids in the weight room.

Size is Easier to Evaluate, Harder to Change

Evaluating the size of your players isn't too hard. Get out a roster, look at your players. Get out a roster of some of the better teams around. Look at their players.

Watch film of your team, and watch film of some of the

bigger teams around. In this case, evaluating a film of your guys against the big boys might be beneficial. You can get a side by side comparison.

Now, are your players big? Its a simple question. Make sure that you look at size from every angle, and be sure to look at size at every position.

1. *Defensive Line*: Are your guys tall? 6'2" is tall for a high school defensive lineman, in my opinion. We are getting into an ideal Defensive End type of size there. But are they big for their frame? Your interior guys, depending on scheme, do not usually need to be tall. But they may need to be wide if you intend to plug gaps.
2. *Inside Linebackers*: The prototype for a high school Linebacker is about 6'0", 200 pounds. 200 pounders will win football games for you. If your kids are 170 pounds at linebacker, you are small. No matter how much heart a kid has. They need to be weight room kids, too, not chubby 200 pounders.
3. *Outside Linebackers*: Most defensive fronts are using some sort of hybrid kid that is considered an outside linebacker. This is where your 170 pound linebacker needs to go, unless he is slow as dirt.
4. *Cornerbacks and Safeties*: The curse of the midget corner seems to plague everyone at some point or another. The only fast kids you have on the team are 5'4" tall barking chihuahuas. You can rule out Cover 2 pretty quick if your corners are tiny. I like safeties who run like deer but look like defensive ends, so if you've got those then you're set.

Evaluating Position Size

1. Defensive Line: Height & Weight
2. Inside Linebackers: Weight Room Kids
3. Outside Backers: Linebacker Size, Safety Speed
4. Corners and Safeties: Height is a Bonus

Team Size Analysis

Once you have collected your information on your players, determine if size is really a plus or a minus for your team. A lot of coaches today think they need a change because they lack team size.

But the fact that so many coaches think they are undersized tells me that most of us have size, just not the size we want.

Determine if you need to adapt your defense to get more size on the field or get smaller and faster players on the field. Remember that having a decent sized kid with great speed is better than having big, slow players out there.

Decide how many legitimate players you have at each position. We are not deciding right now who's going to play, but how many legitimate Defensive Linemen do you have. Guys who fit the mold.

No matter how much you may love a kid, if he's a 5'9", 205 pound defensive lineman, he's not legitimate. That doesn't mean he should not play for you, but we are looking to see where your best and brightest are.

And by the way, do not commit your kids to a position. Just because someone has been a Linebacker for 2 years in your program does not mean he cannot change. Maybe your undersized Linebacker would make a great Safety or Outside Linebacker.

Group your kids by their size, taking speed into consideration, rather than where they have played. See how many true players you have at each position. Use this to help determine how many linemen, linebackers, and safeties you'll want in your new defense (you need two cornerbacks in everything, the problem is finding them).

Be sure to adapt the size expectations at each position to your level of football. I am looking at High School sizes because that's what I know. I don't know how big an 11 year old linebacker is, or should be.

Evaluating Talent: Measuring the Un-Measurables

For all of the measurements we have made so far, we really do not know who the football players are. We're going to evaluate talent now, which is more important than everything else to this point.

Some guys are just football players. They are tenacious, instinctive, driven, leaders, and winners. We have got to have those kids on the field. Even if they do not fit the mold of a certain position, we need to utilize their talents somewhere, somehow.

When you are evaluating talent, do not evaluate the talent you think you can create. If you are not trying to make every kid on your team bigger, stronger, and faster, then you

are not really running a football team. So forget about what you are going to do in the future for now. Look at what you have.

Evaluate film again. Watch a couple of games. Now that you have a little distance between the emotion of the season and now, you can make a more honest evaluation of your kids.

You will probably find that it is never as good, or as bad, as you initially thought it was. Kids that you thought should not have been on the field probably made some pretty good plays. And players who you thought were flawless probably blew it a couple of times.

Find out who seemed to always be in the right spot. See which players made tackles and were always around the ball, sprinting all over the field.

When you see kids forcing turnovers, making plays that you would not expect them to make and could never coach them to make, you are looking at talent. Players who show leadership qualities and enthusiasm have a benefit to the team that height, weight and 40 time cannot show.

I remember having a discussion over replacing one Linebacker with another player who had more speed and athleticism. But the decision not to make the change was made simply because of the way the starter was able to communicate, motivate, and make the other ten players better while he was out there. The more athletic player made us better at only one position, and worse at the other ten.

Evaluating Talent

1. Intangibles like Instinct, Toughness and Drive
2. Leadership on the Field and Off
3. There is no measure for it, but Talent is Obvious

Talent Analysis

The analysis of your individual player talent is easy. It is obvious. Some players are very talented. They are natural football players, natural athletes. Others are not.

Your most talented players need to be on the field in some capacity. They might not fit the desired size and speed, but they can play. Focus on improving the tangibles, while accentuating the intangibles as you prepare to change your team defense.

Using Your Evaluation

If you have taken the time to truly evaluate your players, and look at every aspect of their game, you're ready to move forward. Do not take all these papers and notes and put them in a drawer somewhere. Use it!

You should be able to create a shell of your team defense with your information. You have an idea of who your fastest players are, and who fits the bill at what position in terms of size.

Take the tangible measurements, and compare them with your talent evaluation. How many of the kids who you

have evaluated as having significant football talent, are not in your size and speed evaluation depth charts? Get them in there, where they fit best.

You are not putting anything in stone right now, just getting a picture of your team. We are trying to take much of the emotion out of it right now.

We have to look at the team from the view of an outsider, because you probably will not want to move an All-District Defensive End to Linebacker. Even if it is the right thing to do. You have to separate yourself.

When its all said and done, you probably have one jacked up depth chart. You should be moving guys around based on their size, speed and talent, trying to get them where they belong. If you are fortunate enough to have 11 prototypes, consider yourself lucky and ask yourself why you are wasting so much time. If not, that is okay. We have made a serious evaluation of the team.

The depth chart you end up with has your guys where they are naturally built to play. You have separated them into linemen, inside and outside linebackers, corners and safeties. You took your heart out of the process. See what you have, and lets get moving on putting them into an alignment.

Evaluation should take anywhere from a couple of weeks to a month or more, assuming you have started early. Take your time, because having an honest evaluation of your players is the only way you can make the right decisions moving forward.

Step 2: Take the Time to Evaluate the Teams you Play Against

Prepare to Defend What You Need to Stop

I love defensive football, and given the opportunity I would run absolutely everything. But the fact is, you need to prepare a defense that suits the teams you need to beat.

Your team defense should, ultimately, be designed around shutting down one team. You will need to decide who that key win for your team is. The basic alignment, reads, and keys for your team need to be what is best to stop that opponent.

Adapt to Any Offense

Even though we're focused on stopping one team, being 1-9 at the end of the year is not going to extend your contract. Modern defenses have to be adaptable to anything from Power I to Empty sets.

See what you have on your schedule. Your base is going to be centered around stopping one particular opponent. Your adjustments should be built around the most common adjustments you will need to make. But in the end, have an answer for everything.

Excel Spreadsheet for Evaluating Opponents

	OPP	FORM 1	FORM 2	FORM 3	RUN 1	RUN 2	RUN 3	PASS 1	PASS 2	PASS 3
Game 1	CH	DBLS	TRPS	I	ZONE READ	JET SWEEP	Q CTR	VERTS		
Game 2	TJ									
Game 3	JM									
Game 4	CH									

Where to Get the Information

Unless you are new to the program, and to the area, you should already have information on the majority of your opponents. Just take time to evaluate your old scouting reports and film break downs.

Do not worry too much about what they might do, want to do, etc. Focus on what they do. Even if you know a team is planning to change to a different offense, remember that when times get tough most coaches fall back on what has worked in the past.

The exception here is when a team has hired a new coach. If you know the new coach, and know what he likes to do, take it into account. I would not waste my time preparing to stop the Split Back Veer if Mike Leach was taking over that program next season.

Step 2 is not a long step. You just need to have all the information. What are you really going to be trying to stop?

Coaches have a tendency to get caught up in whatever the hot topic of the moment is. When everyone is changing to the 3-5-3 Defense to stop the Spread Offense, you need to look at what your reality is. If the top teams in your district are running the Wing-T, you might want to reconsider following the crowd.

Step 2 should only take a day or two. Sit down on a Saturday and bust out a report of your opponents. Put it on paper and avoid temptation to go from memory, because this will force honesty. Our perception is not always the reality when we back away from the situation.

Step 3: Know Your Own Strength

The Best Defense is the One You Know Best

One of the most common questions around the forums asks, “What is the best defense to stop [fill in the blank]?” And the most common answer is, whatever you know best.

Every defense works. As long as the defense is sound in design, fills up all of the gaps, and can be adapted to any offense, it will work. The teaching, the adjustment, the attention to detail makes the difference.

If you are looking at moving to a defense that you know absolutely nothing about, you need to find someone who runs that defense and start a serious relationship with them. Until you have actually run it, you will not know how you will be attacked and how to adjust.

Your years of coaching experience, however many there are, have been preparing you for the next game. Do not neglect all of that preparation just because you like what you saw in a Bowl Game. There is no need to change for the sake of change.

Your Staff Needs to Know Everything

What you know, whether you are the Head Coach or Defensive Coordinator, will only take you so far. What your kids know matters.

Your kids are going to learn from their position coaches. If you cannot teach the new defense to every staff member in great detail, then you need to take the time to reevaluate.

Maybe you live football all year round, and have a great football mind. But if your assistants are August to December guys, when are you going to relay all of your knowledge to them?

The complexity of your system is limited by others. If your entire staff will commit to what you are trying to do, then it opens up a world of possibilities. Just do not get carried away and show up with a 120 page playbook and everything stored up in your head.

Evaluating What You Know (...and Your Staff)

Take the time to sit down and do some self-evaluation. It is easy to say, “I’m a 4-4 guy.” But how much do you really know about it? You may like the 4-4 defense, but can you run it effectively?

What coverages do you match with your 4-4 defense front? Can you teach the alignments to everyone? What are the keys for each player, and how will they interpret the reads they get? Do you have a well developed blitz package out of the 4-4 defense, and do you know when to use it? How will opponents attack a 4-4 in your area?

The Evaluation Process for What You Know

You need to evaluate your knowledge of every defense you have ever been involved with. Go all the way back to your beginnings as a coach, and even as a player. Write down every defensive style you have ever coached in or played for.

Next, rate your ability to align the defense. Do you know exactly where each player should be in your base front and coverage? Give yourself a rating from 1 to 5, but be sure you are being honest.

Ask yourself if you know how teams are going to attack that particular style of defense. Where are the bubbles, the open spaces, the weaknesses. Give yourself a rating of 1 to 5 on your knowledge of how your opponents will attack that defense.

What are the adjustments that need to be made with this defense? Can you sit in that same front for the next 10 games? If you can, you're a master. Stop now, and run that defense. If not, give yourself a rating from 1 to 5 on your knowledge of adjustments for that defensive scheme.

Then you will need to be able to teach all the keys and reads for every position. Yes, every position. Just because you were the secondary coach does not mean that you can teach the defensive linemen. Give yourself an honest evaluation by rating your knowledge of each position group, 1 to 5. Then average it and find out your average knowledge of reads and keys for that defense.

If you consider yourself an attack style coach, you better also evaluate your knowledge of the blitz package out of that defense. Do you understand how the blitzes can be run, how they can be used, and when to use them? Give yourself a 1 to 5 on knowledge of blitz schemes for this defense.

Finally, look at coverages and how they match to that defensive front. If you are not sure how fronts match coverages, you will want to learn about it. Evaluate your knowledge of Zone and Man coverages for this particular defensive front, and give yourself a rating between 1 and 5.

Honest Evaluation Of What You Know

1. Write Down Defenses You've Coached
2. Evaluate Knowledge of Alignment (1 to 5)
3. Evaluate Knowledge of Opponent's Attack (1 to 5)
4. Evaluate Knowledge of Adjustments (1 to 5)
5. Evaluate Knowledge of Reads & Keys (1 to 5)
6. Evaluate Knowledge of Blitzes (1 to 5)
7. Evaluate Knowledge of Coverages (1 to 5)

After you have taken your evaluation of each and every defense you have been involved with, make sure that you have your assistants do the same.

Analysis of What You Know

It will be important that you know what everyone on your staff knows. Use their talents and be sure to evaluate and discuss with everyone. There should not be any secrets on your staff. Ask that they, and yourself, leave their ego out of it. Honest evaluation is going to move your program forward.

If you have someone on your staff who is really knowledgeable about a defense other than what you are running or intend to run, see if there is a way to use that knowledge. Be willing to make reasonable concessions in your design of the defense to fit the talents of everyone else.

Just because you may not know that much about a

certain defense, does not mean you should avoid it. But it is important to be honest so you have an idea of how far you have to go.

What you know is irrelevant if you cannot teach it. So having guys who know everything about a certain scheme is meaningless if they are not great teachers. By the same token, you can have a somewhat limited knowledge of a defense, but be able to translate all of that knowledge to your players and have success.

With an honest evaluation of what you and your staff know, you can move forward to begin deciding on the defense that is going to suite you, your staff, your players, and your program the best.

Step 3 is a crucial step, but not a long one. It should only take a day to evaluate what you know. Make sure your entire staff is involved, and that there is a frank and open discussion after the initial evaluation. Your staff members should not be competing with each other to look good, but instead collaborating honestly for the good of your team.

Step 4: Choosing the Right Defense for Your Team

Start with the Front

It makes sense to start with the front, right? Sometimes that is not what happens. Match your coverage to your front, and install a blitz package that fits your front. Do not go the other way.

Your base front needs to stop the run. And remember that it needs to stop the runs that you will be seeing. That base front should, really and truly, be aimed at stopping the running game of one particular opponent.

There are a huge number of fronts to consider, and aspects of each front to think about.

Everything we've done up to this point cannot get thrown out now. The [4-3 Defense](#) is the best defense for stopping the Option, in my opinion. But if I have evaluated everything else and we just do not have a 4-3 Defense team, we be going in another direction.

What is a Front?

Before we go to far, lets address exactly what a defensive front is. There are two types of fronts, either 7 man or 8 man fronts. The front players are specifically assigned to stopping the run first.

The back end, or secondary, are not assigned to stopping the run first. The other 3 or 4 guys not in the front 7

or 8 are looking to defend the pass first. When you are preparing your defense, make sure you know who is in on the run and who is defending pass first.

Do not expect too much out of a run defender versus the pass, and do not expect a pass defender to make a lot of tackles on the run.

7 or 8 Man Front?

Consider the benefits of a 7 man front versus the 8 man front. Obviously, having 8 guys up close to the ball on every play puts you in a better position to stop the run. Having 7 guys means that you're in a 2 high safety look, which makes it easier to create deception.

Even if you line up in a 7 man front, you may still be rolling a safety down in the box late, creating an 8 man front. If you have read some of my blog posts on [Quarters Coverage](#), you know that I believe it can get 9 men in the box off of a 7 man front.

Using your evaluation of players, see if you are better suited for a 7 man front or an 8 man front. If you have two legitimate Safeties, Linebacker sized guys that run like deer, you have what it takes for a 7 man front.

By looking at your evaluation of your opponents, see if you need to be focused on stopping the run or the pass. If you're in an area that throws the ball a lot, you may want to have that extra secondary player. If you know you're going to see heavy running games, an 8 man front might be more beneficial.

Also keep in mind that you can run any coverage with your front, but certain coverages match a 7 man front, and

certain coverages match an 8 man front. Coverages have to match your front, not the other way around, though. Decide on your front first.

Even or Odd?

Now that you know how many players will be in your front, you have to decide on Even or Odd front. Either you have someone head up on the Center, or you do not.

The most important thing here is going to be the number of defensive linemen available to you, and the presence of a dominant Nose Guard. Having a dominant Nose Guard makes you more likely to be successful in an Odd Front.

When you identify that dominant Nose Guard using your player evaluation, you will have an important piece of information. He needs to be physically larger than most of the Offensive Linemen you will see. He should be quick, though not necessarily fast. He will need to be strong as an ox. And he needs to play 60 snaps.

A dominant Nose Guard will be necessary in most cases if you want to run an odd front. He should be big, strong, quick, and have a serious motor.

So You've Got a Nose Guard!

If you have him, and you want to run an odd front, you have a few choices. If you're a 7 man front, you can run the 3-4 Defense or the 5-2 Defense. They are the same, except that the outside linebackers are called defensive ends.

When you want to run an odd, 8 man front, you are probably going to be looking at a [3-5-3](#), [3-3-5](#) or [5-3-3 front](#). They are all the same, once again, except for the differences in what the players are called and how far from the line of scrimmage the line up.

Or Maybe Its the Even Front?

Maybe you have done your full evaluation and find you are short on Nose Guard types. Or maybe you have one, but your evaluation of your knowledge and the knowledge of the staff tells you that you may be better suited to the even fronts.

The good news is that you can run an even front with only one defensive lineman, just like you can in the odd fronts. And it helps if he is a dominant guy, but he does not have to be the huge beast that your Nose Guard does in the odd.

If you have decided on a 7 man front, you will be looking at running the [4-3 Defense](#). The 4-3 Defense uses two high safeties and and puts an emphasis on speed all over the field.

For an 8 man front with an even front, the defense of choice is the [4-2-5 Defense](#), also called the 4-4 Defense. The two are one in the same, just with different names for the outside linebackers.

There are only slight differences between the two, so that you'll probably find yourself lining up at times in a 4-2-5 look even if you decide on a 4-3 Defense.

This is somewhat true of the 3-4 and 3-5-3 defenses, though the reads and keys for those two defenses, as well as style of play calling, generally differ greatly.

7 Man Front

Odd: 3-4 Defense

Even: 4-3 Defense

8 Man Front

Odd: 3-5-3 Defense

Even: 4-2-5 Defense

Analysis of Choosing a Front

At this point we have broken down defensive football to its bare basics. We have selected the right defensive front to stop the run, and nothing else. You will win more games than you lose if you stop the run.

If you have taken your time and gone through the process, it may have taken you two months to get to this point. That is okay, it was time well spent. You and your staff can rest easy knowing that you've made the right choices.

You can be confident that you do not need to make some knee-jerk changes in the middle of the season when things do not go perfectly, because you took the time to do it right from the start. Congratulations!

Now get to work, you've got a defense to learn!

Step 4 should not take long. All of the hard work was done earlier. Take the time to have a serious discussion and consider all avenues during this step, then decide. Make sure everyone is behind the decision and move on.

Step 5: Learning the In's and Out's of Your Base Defense

Don't Want to Miss a Thing

Now is where the fun part comes in. You are going to learn a defense. Draw stuff up, talk about how you can stop this and if this happens you can stop this and then... ah, it is fun.

It is always better when on paper. But make sure that you can actually teach what is on paper. What we are doing in this step is not just learning alignments and reads. We are learning techniques, and how to teach them. We are learning drills to put the skills we need into the players we utilize. We are learning to teach the defense.

Gather The Resources Available to You

Compile an extensive list of who is going to help you. There are so many people willing to exchange information in this game that it can get a little overwhelming, so we need to take the time to decide who to listen to.

Start with free resources like Football-Defense.com and the forums on CoachHuey.com that are available on the Internet. Here you should be able to learn the basics of any defense that you want to learn about.

Another free resource are contacts that you have made throughout your career. Call up people you know, and pick their brain. If they're not a close acquaintance, you need to already have some idea of what you're calling for. Have a

specific set of questions in mind and do not waste their time rambling on about every possible event.

Use local colleges as well, and travel if you need to. You can learn more by learning from a local college or a high school that is not in your district or region than from anywhere else. They will be able to tell you the exact problems you can run into, and teach you adjustments. They have been there and done that.

There are a huge number of books and videos available to you today as well. You can find books at FootballCoachingBooks.com, or check out Amazon.com for more books. You can also find reviews throughout the internet.

If you are looking to run the 4-3 Defense, [I have written an eBook on it](#) that is affordable and downloadable.

For videos, ChampionshipProductions.com has a huge selection of coaching DVDs, as well as DVDs that are available at [Coaches Choice](http://CoachesChoice.com). They are not cheap, so it is best to ask around and find out what you should be buying.

Learn More at Clinics

Another great way to gather a lot of information in a hurry is to visit some of the larger clinics out there. Usually you can find a number of local clinics to attend, but the big ones give you a lot of variety.

I like to attend the [Glazier Clinics](#). There are a huge variety of coaches from High School, College and the NFL at each clinic. They are usually over a weekend and since we are on the Atlantic Coast, there are several within a reasonable driving distance.

There are a lot of other big clinics around, but I have never attended them. I can only recommend Glazier Clinics. Get active, and be open to the ideas that are offered there. Even if you do not use them right now, you will want to have some more ideas in your mind when it is time to make adjustments.

Resources for Your Defense

1. Football Blogs and Forums on the Internet
2. Coaching Contacts You Have Made
3. Other Programs, Local Colleges
4. Books and Videos
5. Clinics

Choose Your Path and Make a Commitment

When you decide the direction you want to go in, make a commitment to it. You have decided on your front, now you've decided on who you're going to listen to. Commit to it.

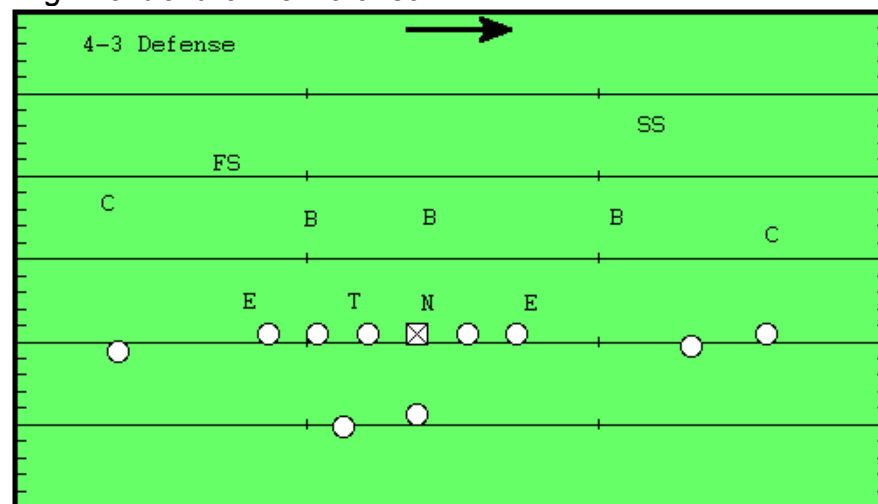
Every good speaker, video maker, or article writer should be able to convince you that their idea is a good one. You have to have some blinders on that no matter how good some idea sounds, you have committed to go in a certain direction.

Get Your Base Alignment

Knowing how many guys are on the line, and how many are linebackers, does not give you a front. You must know precisely how each player will align in your defense.

You will want to have specific instructions, with terminology that your entire coaching staff will use. And you should have a reason for every alignment. Where a player lines up should put him in the best position to make the plays he needs to make.

Alignment of the 4-3 Defense



To decide on your base alignment, go back to your analysis of opponents. Who was the one team you felt like you needed to beat, and what were they running?

Draw up their top formations and top running plays. Remember that with the base front we're trying to stop the run, not the pass. If you can stop the run, you will win more than you lose.

Now start putting your players in the places they need to be to suffocate those running lanes that your opponent wants to use. Make sure you're following sound defensive principles. Every gap must be accounted for, every player must have responsibilities for plays to his side and plays away,

and every player must have a key to indicate to him what play he expects to defend.

Sound Defense

1. Every Gap is Accounted For
2. Every Player Has a Play Side Responsibility
3. Every Player Has a Back Side Responsibility
4. Every Player Has a Key to Read

Keys and Reads

Now that everyone knows where to start the play, it is time to establish where they are going. We are still focusing in on stopping that one team we know we have got to beat.

Looking at their best run plays, what will you be able to use to indicate to your players what is happening? How should your defensive linemen approach the offensive line so that they get to the right place? Should the linebackers be reading backs, guards, or a two man surface (Tackle and Guard)? Or a combination?

Go back to your evaluation of your staff. What do your staff members and you feel most comfortable doing? Even though you have done something in the past, you may not be comfortable with it if you did not have much success. Decide what you feel best in doing, and how you are going to learn to do it even better.

When you decide who to key, and how to read them, start putting it in writing. Write down with great detail how your players will react to every conceivable movement of their key. The Guard can go in any one of 8 directions, so the

Linebacker or Defensive Tackle that is reading him needs to know what to do on each.

Be extremely detailed in this step. Because we are going to review it and throw out most of that detail in a minute. For now, write down how it would be if your player could read their player perfectly, on every snap.

Got all that? Good.

Eliminate the “If’s”

Now you should have a lot of “If he does this, you do that” type of statements listed out. Most of them, when you look closely, are probably pretty similar. If they are not simple, make them simple (see how that works?).

The maximum number of “If’s” I would want to give a kid is three. Why three? The number holds some significance to humans. We like things that come in three's. One is not enough, they will pick on your kid all night because they know what he is going to do. Two would be better than three, but I just do not think it would be enough.

For example, Defensive Linemen in a 4-3 Defense should read a block to, block away, and pass set. Three reads. On the block to, he attacks the outside shoulder of the lineman, squeezes him back into the hole, rips off and controls his gap. On a block away, he bends down the line of scrimmage and blows up anything he sees. On a pass set, he rushes the passer and works a move.

If he had more than that to do, his brain would lock up at some point. He would have excuses. We eliminate excuses by making it simple, and living with the fact that it may not always be perfect.

Establish the Footwork for Your Players

Decide how your players are going to move their feet (and hands, for the defensive line) to get to the ball carrier. Footwork can be overlooked, but again the details will make you successful.

Too often, coaches just tell a kid to “get there” when they see a certain key. But we need to teach how to get there. On the snap, our linebackers are taking a read step and keying the Tailback. When the Tailback comes downhill to their side, they fill the gap now. The base stays wide, the feet are under control and the player does not get over extended. He shuffles down into the hole.

On an outside run read, he immediately uses lateral run footwork to get over the top. He reaches out with his front foot, then brings his back foot across, running with his legs but keeping his shoulders square.

The details are extremely important. Decide exactly how you want your players to work their feet, and establish exactly how you will explain it to them. Now may be a good time to start working on some drills for footwork, too.

Block Destruction for your Base Defense

The way that you teach your players to defeat blocks is going to be crucial to the success of your defense. They have to use an established block destruction technique or they will wind up trying to run around blocks.

Make sure you have decided on if you are going to be a team trying to spill everything to the outside, or keep it inside. It goes back to your analysis of what you and your staff know, as well as what your opponents are going to do to you.

Once you have decided, you should know how you are going to teach your squeeze or wrong arm technique. The defensive linemen will need to know their engage and escape rules for handling offensive linemen as well. Establish how the defensive line will defeat double teams, too.

Linebackers get taught how to rip off a block, or take on a blocker and shed him. They have so little time to think about doing this that they need a single rule to follow. How the defensive line takes on blocks will affect how they fill gaps, so make sure the linebackers understand what is happening up front as well.

Putting your Base Front Together

Once you have taken time to put your base front together, you should be able to stop anyone. At least, that is the plan. Your base defense is what you would live in if you have to. When the bullets are flying and you are not sure what to do, the base defense is your go-to plan.

Since you have taken the time to go through every step, you are going to have an extremely good understanding of your defense. As long as you followed sound defensive principles, it should be a good one.

Step 5 is the groundwork of your new defense. Take as much time as you need, because if nothing else gets done right, you could still fall back on your base defense. Have confidence in what you develop during this step.

Step 6: Attacking the Offense with Multiple Fronts and Blitzes

Those Guys Study Too

As much work as you have put into this defense, you are probably thinking that you should be way ahead of the other guys. The bad news is that they are doing the same thing you are.

So how can you prepare yourself to answer their hard work? Know what the opponent is going to see in your defensive front. Where are the weaknesses, the bubbles in the run game? How would you attack that? Then decide what you can do to throw off the opponent again.

Using Multiple Fronts to Gain the Advantage

Some guys like to stay in just one front, all the time. That is fine if you know what you are doing and have talented players. I like to confuse the offensive line with a few different fronts, though.

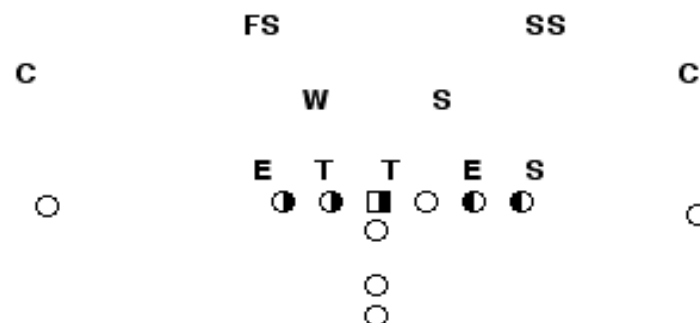
From coaching offensive line, I know that those guys are not perfect. If you adjust the front, they are going to make a mistake on their rules on occasion. The more looks they need to defend, the more success you can have.

And here's the other secret... it does not have to be a big change. For example, in the 4-2-5 Defense a couple of years ago, we used three fronts more often than any other. One was a base front with the weak Tackle shaded on the center. The second was a G front, where the weak Tackle

lined up on the inside shade of the Guard. The move was about 2 feet over. The third was a Gaps front, where he lined up directly in between the Center and Guard. Those three fronts were enough to cause confusion for offensive blocking schemes.

You do not need to get wild and crazy with your fronts. Multiple does not mean having a 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 man defensive line. Fronts should be cheap. They should change one or two players, and only slightly. They should take almost no time to install. And your defense should be able to use a number of them.

Under Front in the 4-3 Defense



Make sure that your base technique fits with the fronts you are trying to run. When we ran a 3-5-3 defense, the defensive line used a hard slant on almost every play. We tried to use a 4-2-5 look as a change-up, but we just did not have the technique in our arsenal to effectively play shaded on the outside of offensive linemen. Other coaches have done it, but we as coaches were not up to the challenge.

Multiple Fronts for Cheap Fun

1. Only Slight Changes from Your Base
2. Simple Adjustments Affect Few Players
3. Each Front Has a Reason and a “Right Time”
4. Fronts Take Little Time to Install

Using Blitzes to Give a New Look

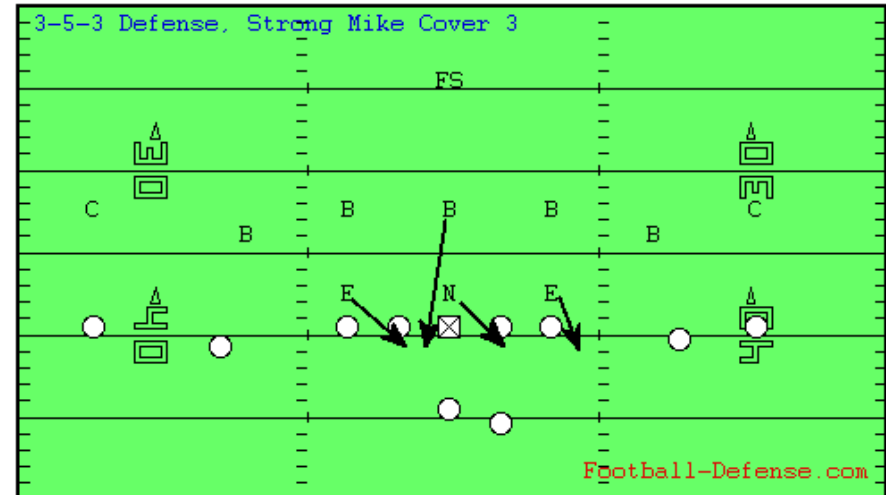
Another way to confuse offensive blocking schemes and put pressure on your opponent is to use a wide variety of blitzes. You are not going to be able to run nearly as many blitzes as you are fronts, but they can have a tremendous effect.

Hopefully you have a coaching philosophy, but if not then sit down and work on one. Are you an attacking defensive coach, or a “bend but don't break” guy? The two are not really compatible. You have to be something.

If you are a “bend but don't break” coach, then you will only need a few simple blitzes. If you are running an even front, you really only need to be able to bring any one of the linebackers at any time.

For an odd front, you want to be able to bring five at some point, but not often. Most of the time, you'll probably either bring an outside linebacker in the 3-4 defense, or an inside linebacker in the 3-5-3 defense.

4 Man Pressure in 3-5-3 Defense



Aggressive Blitzes for the Mad Scientist

Then you have got the guys with the napkins. We can really draw up some fantastic blitzes on a napkin if given the chance. 5, 6, 7 and even 8 man pressures can be drawn up. The issue is not creating them, it is installing them.

Attacking with Blitzes

1. Use simple blitzes for added pressure.
2. Use more exotic blitzes for specific purposes.
3. Keep your blitz package limited, pay attention to how much your kids can take in.
4. Be sure to teach your kids how to blitz.

Blitzes, unlike fronts, are not cheap. They involve multiple moving parts. Blitzes that bring one linebacker are easy, but if you go beyond that it gets tougher.

The easiest defense to bring a lot of pressure from all different angles is the 3-5-3 Defense. It is built and designed around the principle of blitzing a lot. There is movement everywhere.

For the mad scientists who want to bring pressure from all over, 7 man fronts offer more options and flexibility. The 3-4 and 4-3 Defense make it easy to bring a variety of blitzes.

Using line movements coupled with linebacker and even safety and corner blitzes, you'll be able to dictate to the offense. What's important is not drawing up neat blitzes, it is deciding exactly why you need to install them.

I do not believe in using more than two or three exotic blitzes in any given week. Start the week with three of them, and narrow it down if we're not hitting on all cylinders with each blitz. This will keep the defensive coordinator from clouding his mind with all sorts of blitzes. He'll have one to three blitzes that he is looking to use in very specific situations.

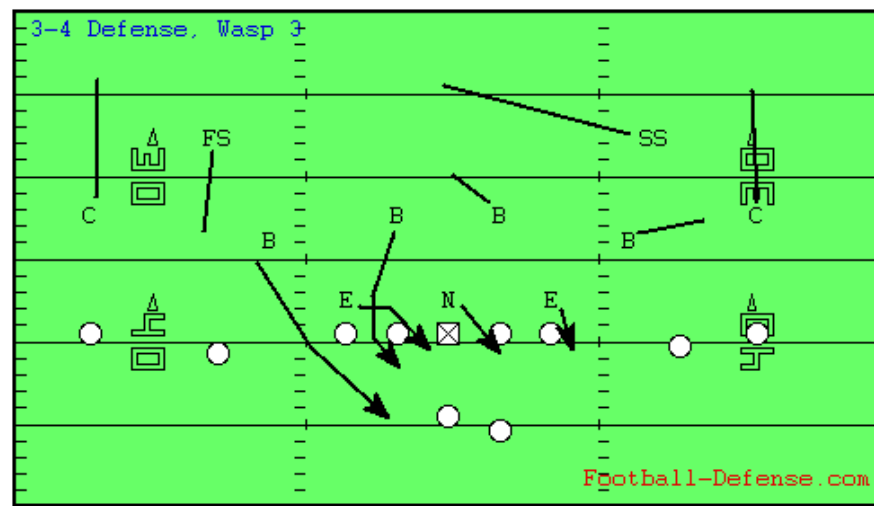
Deciding on When to Call a Blitz

The key to using blitzes is to look at what your opponent that week does best, and then choose three blitzes that will match those plays. Look for situations you want to use them.

Many coaches make the mistake of thinking that blitzes are only for rushing the passer. Blitzing against the run involves some risk, but the reward can be extremely high. Make sure you do your homework and make the calls in the

right situation, but as long as your blitz package is sound, like your defense, there should be no issues.

America's Fire Zone, a Single Edge Zone Blitz



To be an aggressive blitzer, make sure that your players know why you are blitzing. And make sure they know how to blitz.

If you have not already done it as you started working on your blitz package, start putting together a plan for teaching each position to blitz now.

Now that we have taken care of the front, we will actually start to cover passes in the next step.

Step 6 will be the deception of your defense. Take the time to put together a package, and make sure you have a reason for everything you want to install. Remember that the ability of your players to run it means more than your ability to draw it up.

Step 7: Creating Your Coverage Package to Stop the Pass

Force the Offense to Throw the Ball

We want the offense to have to throw the ball. You can still win if you give up 300 yards passing. But if you give up 300 yards rushing, the game will be just about over.

That does not mean that we're going to let them throw the ball. Your coverage needs to match your front, because the front comes first. Use a coverage that is a natural fit for your defensive front, and then make sure your players know it.

Use a Simple, Effective Base Coverage

The base coverage needs to match your front. If you are a person who believes strongly in man coverage, you can run any front with it.

Zone coverages with an 8 man front are simple. You need to run Cover 3. You can adapt any coverage to any front, but the natural zone coverage for an 8 man front is Cover 3.

For a 7 man front, your choices are much more varied. Along with man coverages, you can use any zone package. 7 man fronts are great for disguising coverages and running a lot of different looks.

Cover 2 was the coverage that was once used with the 4-3 Defense as well as 5-2 Defenses. Today, many 4-3 and 3-4 Defenses use Cover 4 and Quarters coverages behind

them. Robber coverages and other more exotic coverages can also be run (but they are all variations of Cover 2, Cover 3, and Cover 4).

7 man fronts also work well with Cover 3, as you can roll a safety down to either side, confusing the Quarterback's reads.

Natural Zone Coverage Fits

7 Man Fronts: Cover 2, Cover 4, Roll Cover 3

8 Man Fronts: Cover 3

Man Coverage (Cover 1, Cover 0) fits with any front!

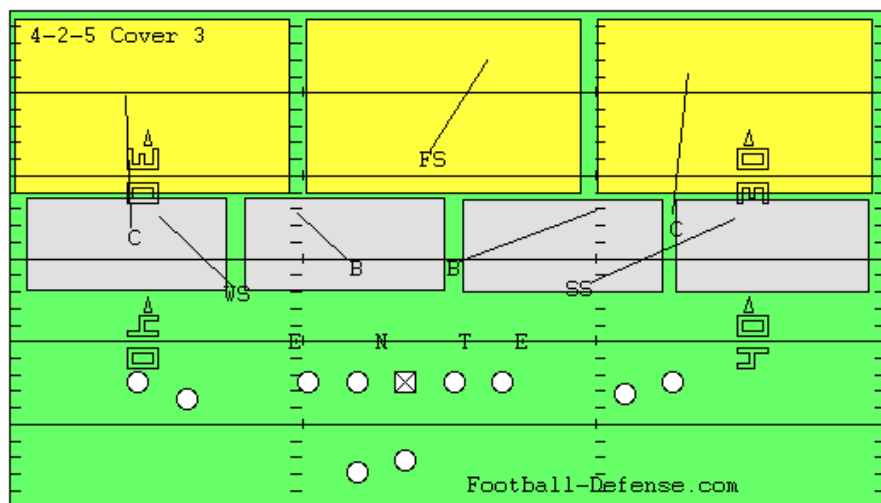
How Many Coverages?

To have an effective coverage package, you'll need more than one zone coverage. Every coverage has holes in it, and part of your work will be deciding exactly where the holes are.

After identifying the holes in the coverage you are going to base out of, look for a coverage that takes away those weaknesses. For example, in Cover 3 the seams are vulnerable. Cover 2 will close the seam to Quarterbacks, because of the Safety sitting directly over top of the hash routes.

Every coverage package needs to have man coverages. Not only does man coverage, and particularly press man coverage, create frustration for the Quarterback if run well, and offer fewer holes, but it opens up your blitz package.

Cover 3 from the 4-2-5 Defense



Be Detailed in Teaching Coverages

Take as much time to teach your coverage reads as you do your run reads. The back end should be using their eyes to diagnose the play just as the linebackers and defensive linemen are.

Go back to the evaluation of your opponent, as well as the evaluation of your players, to decide how they need to play coverage. For zone coverages, you will need to decide between spot dropping and pattern reading.

Spot dropping is going to be simple, easy to teach, and effective. Pattern reading is going to take a significant amount of practice time, but puts your players in the best position to make a play when taught correctly. You will need to decide what fits your players and staff best.

Use Your Coverages With Your Blitzes

If you're going to use more exotic blitzes, you'll probably want to use man coverage and zone coverage behind them. To do that, decide what you want to run and see how it fits with your base coverages.

When you base out of man coverage, there's no problem running all of your blitzes. But if you're using zone coverage, decide how your coverage packages are going to run together.

If you want to run a Fire Zone coverage concept with 3 under, 3 deep, you should be running Cover 3 as part of regular cover package. That way, you aren't teaching but so many concepts.

One of the best ways to use multiple coverage packages is to teach just a couple of concepts to your players, and then use different looks where every player is doing one of those two concepts.

Good news! We have everything we need to start the season. But what happens with all of this stuff is not working? Be ready for the worst case scenario.

Step 7 is going to take time. Your fronts and your Coverages work together. In fact, without matching the Fronts and coverages, you will not know who the force Players are in your defense. Take your time, and get it right. You will probably take a couple of months to develop your Fronts and coverages completely.

Step 8: Preparing to Make Adjustments to Your Defense

Expect the Unexpected

After spending most of your off season preparing to stop the best plays your opponents have to offer, we are not done. Now you need to take some time to figure out what they're going to do when you stop them in their tracks.

Let's face it, every offense is doing the same thing. They have a plan. Their plays are strung together so that if you take Play X away, they'll run Play Y. And when you take Play Y away, they'll be expecting Play Z to be wide open.

Its a chess match, and it is the reason that this game is so much fun. When you have been coaching a defense for years, you can almost instinctively make adjustments. But with a brand new defense, you need to prepare.

Where are Your Weaknesses?

The offense is going to break down film and look for your weaknesses. You have already identified those weaknesses though, and are ready.

Know where the bubbles in your defense are. In Step 6, we closed those bubbles with different fronts and blitzes. Be ready to make those adjustments when the time comes.

Stop them in your base defense first, before going to all of the change-ups. For one thing, that is what makes them change-ups.

Have a Plan, and Do Not Panic!

There is a good chance that, at some point, you are going to run into a snag. Your defense, no matter how good it is, will probably give up some yards. They are going to give up some points.

And at some point, when you are running a brand new defense, you will be out-coached.

Thats right. Take it in. Think about it. You spent all this time preparing your defense, but the good teams have spent just as much time preparing their offense. Most teams are going to lose, sometime.

So have a plan for when you hit hard times. Stay confident in what you are doing. You put months worth of work into building your defense. You have followed the steps and done a great job. Stay the course. Take your lumps, learn from them, make adjustments, and keep fighting.

When you run into trouble, use the resources we have talked about to ask for help. And any time that you make an adjustment or change something about your defense and the way you teach it, write it down. Keep a record of the evolution of the defense.

By keeping records, you avoid back tracking and doing the same things over again. You will have a file on how you have defended various challenges throughout your career.

Good luck with your new defense in the upcoming season! Never stop learning, and visit Football-Defense.com any time for more ideas about coaching defensive football!

Resources

Where to Go From Here?

If you have read this eBook and are looking to make a change to your defense, you may need some more resources. Many of these were covered in Step 5. You can also check out my blog at Football-Defense.com for more websites in the blog roll and throughout our posts.

These are some of my personal recommendations on books and videos that may be useful to you. All of these are resources I have used.

4-3 Defense

[Coaching Football's 4-3 Defense](#) by Tim Simons is where I originally learned the 4-3 defense.

[Installing Football's 4-3 Over Defensive Front](#) is my book on the complete installation of the 4-3 Defense.

3-5-3 Defense

[Coaching the 3-5-3 Defense](#) by Thomas Cousins, the most thorough and effective book on the 3-5-3 Defense.

[Basics of the 3-5-3 Defense](#) from Georgia Military College. These DVDs are how I learned the defense and are still the best.

3-4 Defense and 4-2-5 Defense

Unfortunately, I do not have any great resources on the 4-2-5 Defense or the 3-4 Defense to recommend. That is not

to say that they are not out there, but that I have not used them and do not want to recommend something having never actually seen it.

I have written quite a bit about both defenses on Football-Defense.com, particularly on the 4-2-5. That is a good starting point. Another place to look is CoachHuey.com, where you can find information on any defense (and anything about football) using the search feature.

46 Bear Defense

I have not yet mentioned the 46 Defense because it is not one of the more conventional defenses. But in a list of resources, I have to mention Rex Ryan's [Coaching Football's 46 Defense](#).

Even if you are not going to run the 46 defense, it is one of the best books available on defensive line play.

I hope these resources are helpful, and I am always available to you through the [Contact page](#) at Football-Defense.com if you need anything!