
HS Special Teams Playbook

Complete Kicking Game Manual

Gridiron Encyclopedia

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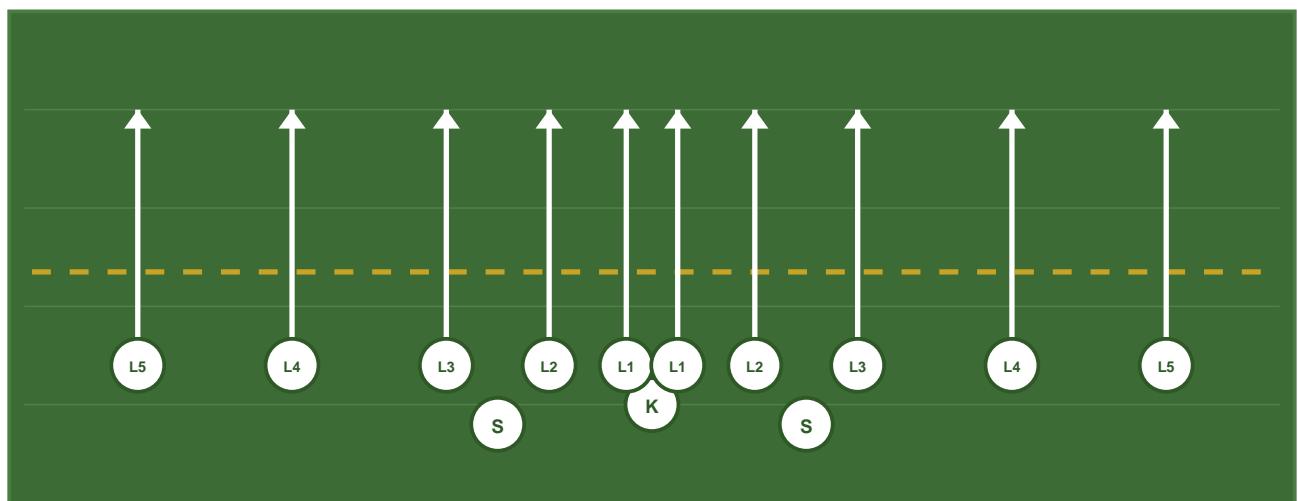
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Philosophy & Overview

Special teams is the phase of football that wins close games. A blocked punt, a long kickoff return, or a missed assignment in coverage can swing the outcome of any contest. Every player on every special teams unit must know their lane, their responsibility, and their mentality. Effort and discipline on special teams directly translates to championships. We practice these units with the same intensity and detail as offense and defense. There is no such thing as a "special teams player" — there are only football players who execute their assignments.

Kickoff Cover (5-Lane)

The cover team is organized into 5 lanes across the field. Two safeties hang back as the last line of defense. The contain players on each edge force the return inside, while the lane runners squeeze the return to the middle. The wedge buster attacks the return team wedge up the middle.

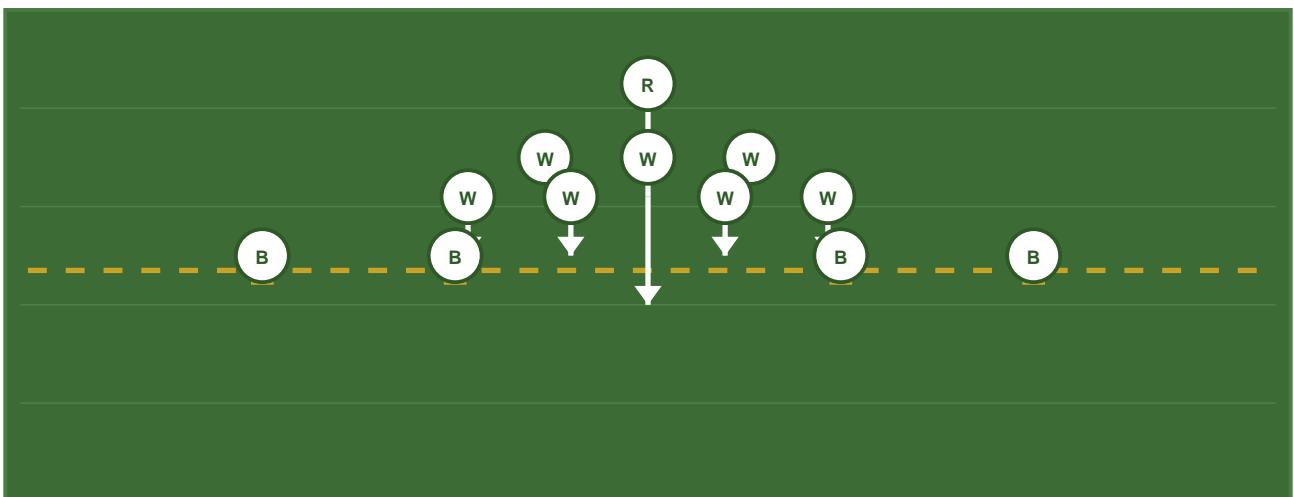


Kickoff Cover (5-Lane)

- L1 (contain): Force the return inside. Do not get hooked or sealed.
- L2-L4 (lane runners): Stay in your lane. Squeeze laterally, tackle inside-out.
- L3 (wedge buster): Attack the wedge. Disrupt the blocking scheme.
- Safeties: Hang 15 yards behind the front. Clean up anything that breaks through.

Kickoff Return (Wedge)

A double-wedge formation at the 30-yard line creates a wall of blockers. The front wedge sets up 5 yards ahead of the rear wedge. The return man catches the kick and hits the seam between the two wedge lines, following the blockers upfield.

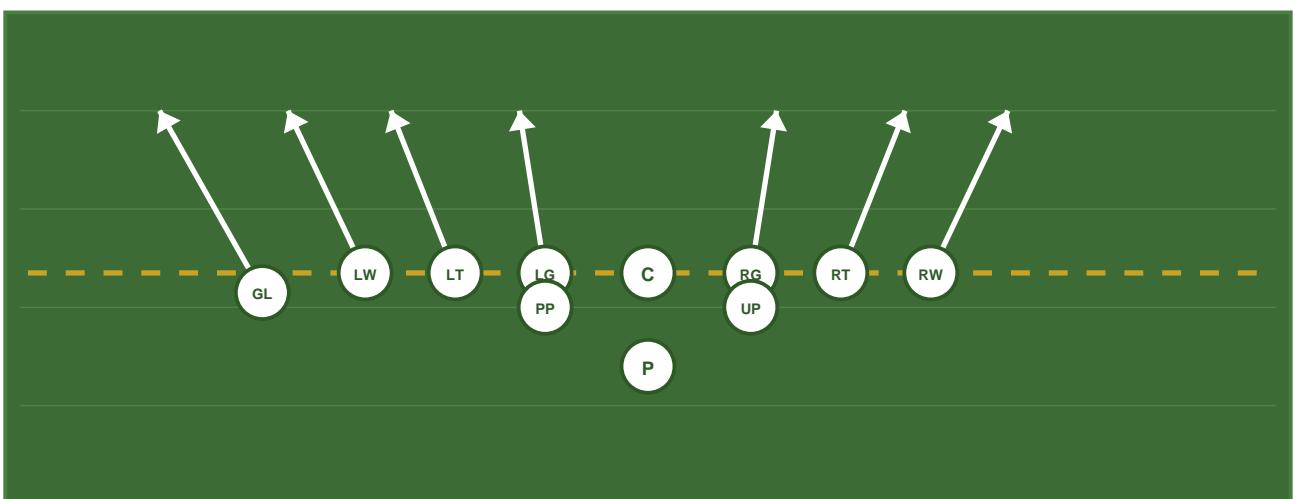


Kickoff Return (Wedge)

- Front wedge: Set up at the 35. Block the first cover man in your lane.
- Back wedge: Set up at the 30. Seal inside-out, create the crease.
- Return man: Catch the ball, hit the seam at full speed. Trust the wedge.
- Front line: Attack cover men aggressively. Do not let them get to your lane.

Punt Protection (Spread)

The personal protector reads the defensive alignment and calls the protection. The wings on each side block the edge rushers. The interior linemen step to protect their gaps. The cover team releases after the punt to cover their lanes downfield.

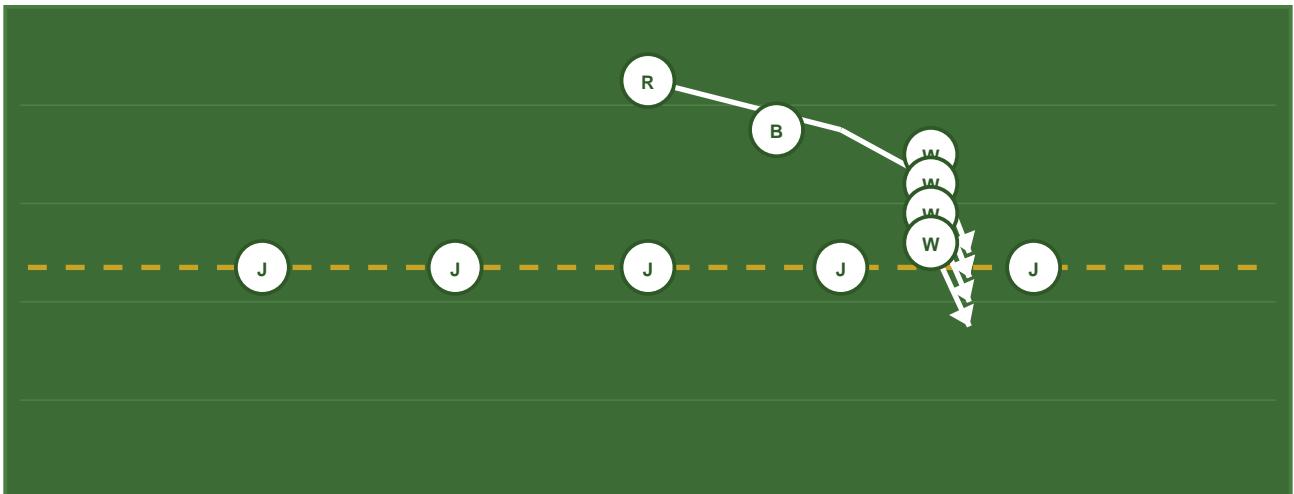


Punt Protection (Spread)

- PP: Read the rush. Identify any overloads and adjust protection.
- Wings: Block the edge rusher. Do not let anyone clean off the edge.
- Interior OL: Step to your gap, absorb the rush, then release to cover.
- Punter: Catch, 2 steps, punt. Get the ball off in 2.0 seconds or less.

Punt Return (Wall Return)

Four blockers set a wall on the return side of the field. The return man catches the punt and hits the wall at full speed. The wall blockers maintain their blocks and run in front of the return man. The non-wall players hold up gunners and slow the coverage.

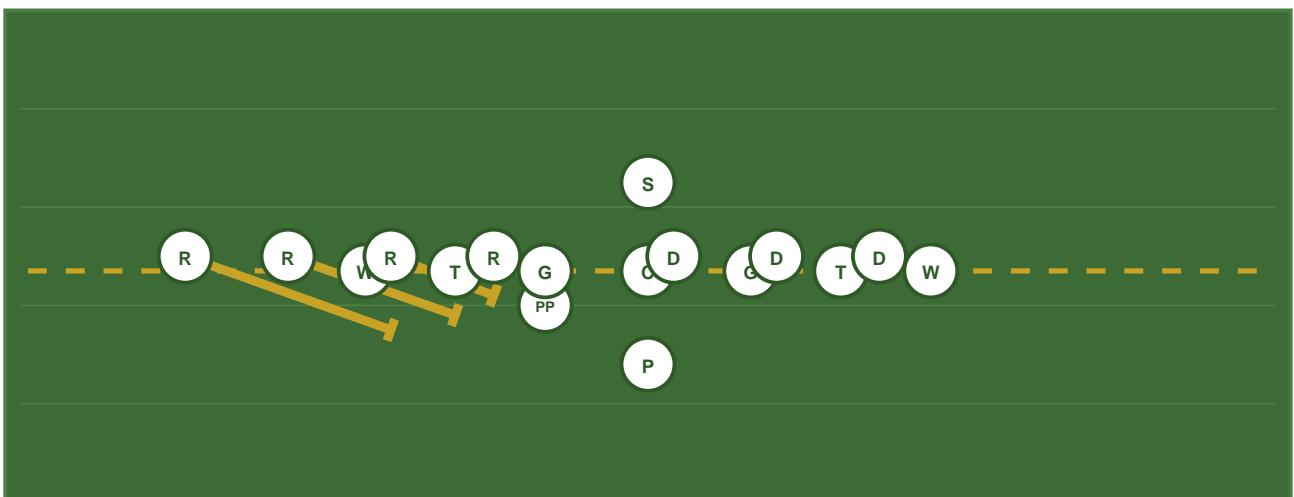


Punt Return (Wall Return)

- Wall blockers: Set 10 yards from the sideline on the return side. Stay in front.
- Return man: Catch the punt, get to the wall. Be decisive — hit it at speed.
- Jammers: Hold up the gunners at the line. Give the wall time to set.
- The first 10 yards of return determine the success. Quick decisions.

Punt Block (Overload)

Overload one side of the punt shield with extra rushers. The edge rusher on the overload side has a clean lane to block the punt. Interior players hold their gaps to prevent a fake. The block point is 5-7 yards in front of the punter.

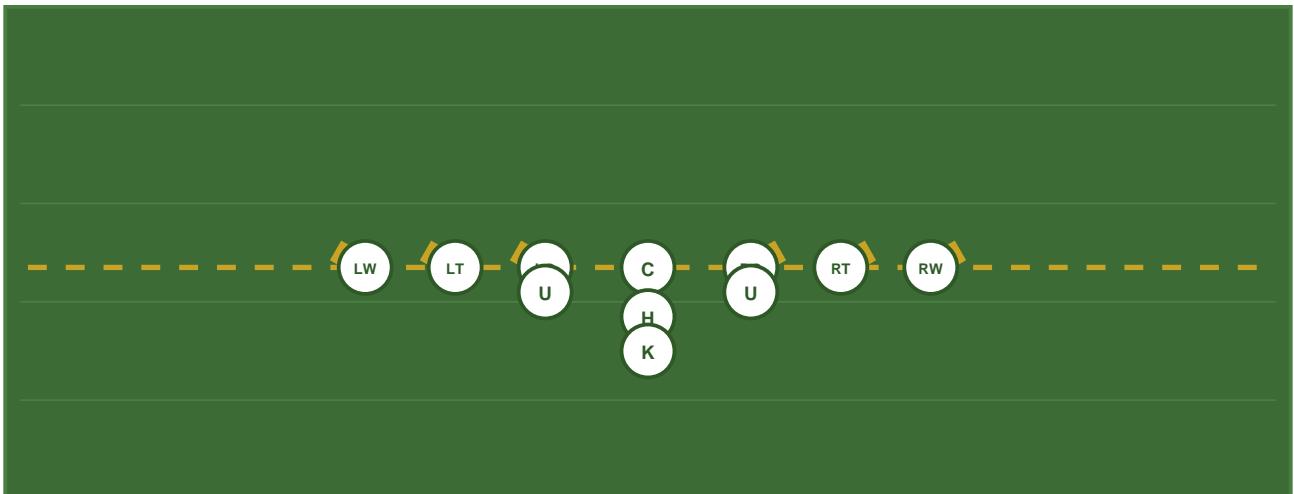


Punt Block (Overload)

- Edge rusher: Full speed. Aim for the block point 7 yards in front of the punter.
- Interior rushers: Attack your gap to create chaos and prevent a fake.
- Safety: Stay back in case of a fake punt pass or run.
- DO NOT rough the punter. Block the ball, not the kicker.

FG / PAT Protection

Standard 7-man front protection with the center, holder, and kicker in the backfield. The wings and guards form a pocket, blocking from the inside out. The operation must be completed in 1.3 seconds from snap to kick (HS timing).

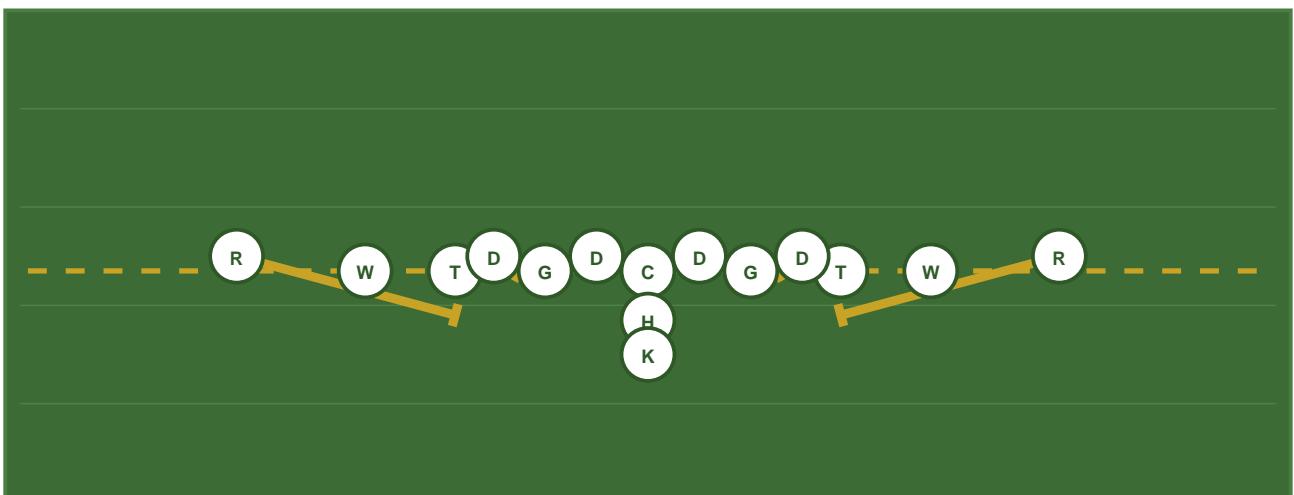


FG / PAT Protection

- Center: Clean snap to the holder. Hit him in the hands every time.
- Holder: Catch, spot, and spin the laces forward. Quick hands.
- Wings: Block the edge. Do not let anyone come clean off the outside.
- Timing target: 1.3 seconds from snap to kick for field goals.

FG Block (Edge Rush)

Align wide outside the wing and attack the edge at the snap. The goal is to get penetration past the wing blocker and get your hands up in the kick lane. The interior defenders occupy blockers to prevent a slide to the edge.



FG Block (Edge Rush)

- Edge rushers: Wide alignment. Attack outside the wing at full speed.
- Get your hands up at the block point. Do not leave your feet.
- Interior: Occupy blockers so they cannot help on the edge.
- If the kick is up, rally to the ball in case of a miss or short kick.

Onside Kick

Players are bunched to one side of the field for a surprise short kick. The kicker aims for the ball to travel just past 10 yards. The hands team is positioned to recover the ball immediately. Timing and ball placement are critical for success.



Onside Kick

- K: Drive the ball into the ground at the right hash. Ball must travel 10 yards.
- Hands team: Sprint to the ball. First priority is recovery, not advance.
- Decoy players: Sprint downfield to sell a normal kickoff look.
- Only call this when the element of surprise is intact.

Quick Reference / Glossary

Gunner

The fastest players on the punt team who release wide to cover the punt return. Typically line up at the widest position.

Personal Protector (PP)

The player aligned in front of the punter responsible for reading the rush and calling protection adjustments.

Wedge

A formation of blockers on kickoff return who form a wall for the returner to run behind.

Contain

The responsibility of the edge coverage players to keep the return inside and prevent a sideline breakaway.

Lane Integrity

Each cover player staying in their assigned lane to prevent big returns through gaps in coverage.

Block Point

The spot in the air where the ball can be blocked. For punts, typically 5-7 yards in front of the punter.

Operation Time

The total time from snap to kick. HS FG standard is 1.3 seconds; HS punt standard is 2.0 seconds.

Jammer

Players assigned to hold up or slow down gunners at the line of scrimmage on punt returns.