
HS 3-4 Defense Playbook

Versatile Odd-Front Defense

Gridiron Encyclopedia

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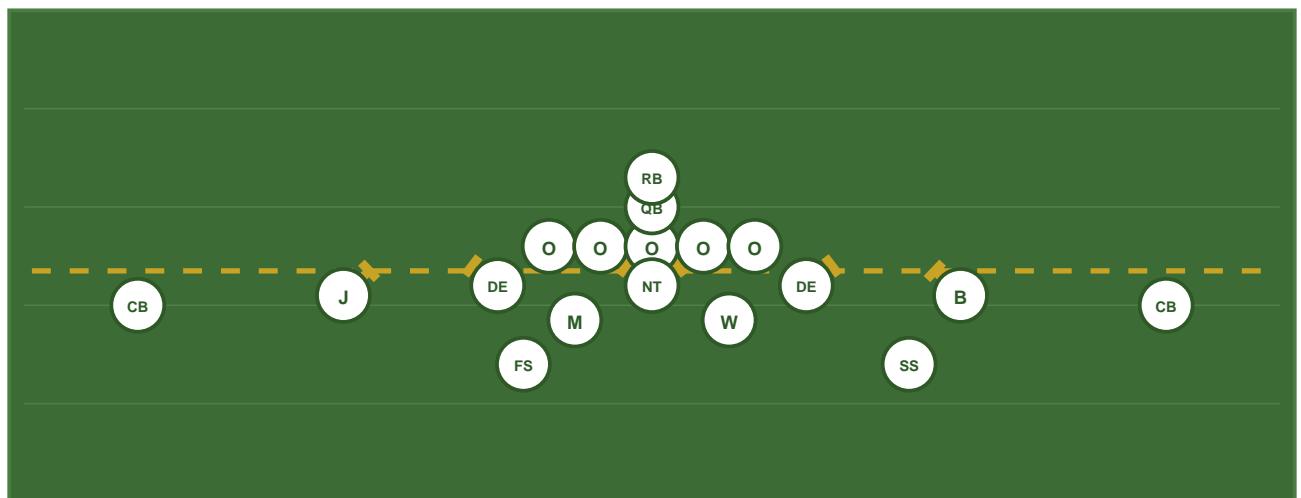
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Philosophy & Overview

The 3-4 defense uses 3 down linemen (a nose tackle and 2 defensive ends), 4 linebackers (2 inside and 2 outside), and 4 defensive backs. Its greatest asset is the ability to disguise who is rushing the passer. The nose tackle two-gaps the center, controlling both A-gaps and freeing the inside linebackers to flow to the ball. Outside linebackers are hybrid players — they can rush, drop into coverage, or play the run on any given snap. The defense thrives on deception: showing one look pre-snap, executing another post-snap.

Base 3-4 Alignment

The foundation of the defense. The nose tackle aligns in a 0-technique (head-up on center) and two-gaps. The two defensive ends play 5-techniques (outside shoulder of the offensive tackles). The OLBs align on the edge, and the ILBs stack behind the DL, reading their keys.

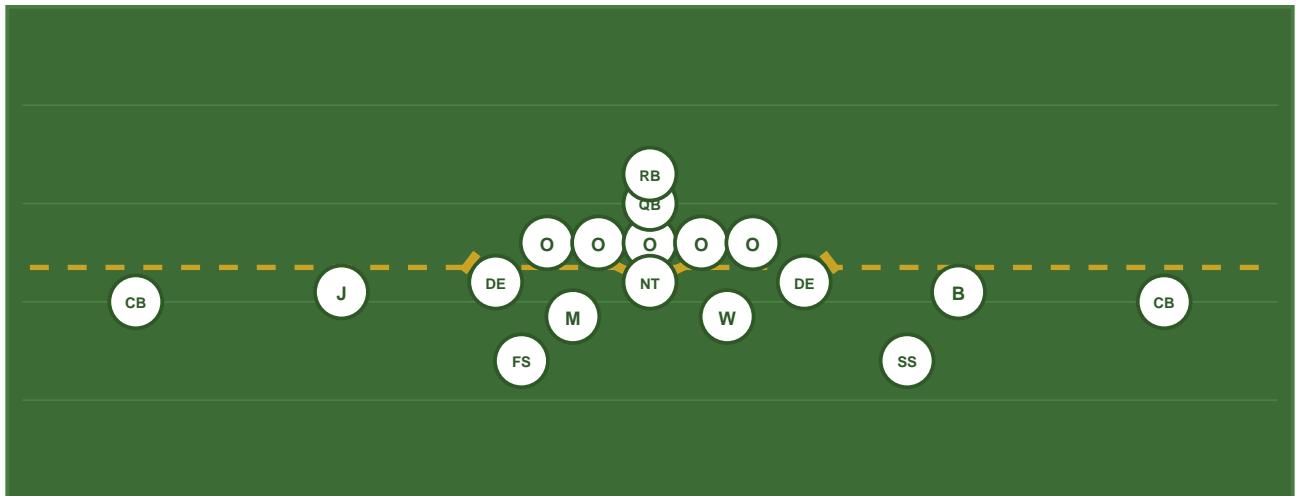


Base 3-4 Alignment

- NT: Head-up on the center. Two-gap technique — control the blocker and play both A-gaps.
- DEs: 5-technique on the OTs. Set the edge and squeeze down on runs.
- OLBs: Stand up on the edge. Walk up or drop based on the call.
- ILBs: Stacked behind the DL. Read guards for run/pass keys.

Two-Gap Technique

The nose tackle demonstrates two-gap control by engaging the center and playing both A-gaps. The NT controls the blocker with his hands, reads the play flow, and sheds to the ball side. This is the anchor of the 3-4 front — if the NT loses, both A-gaps open.

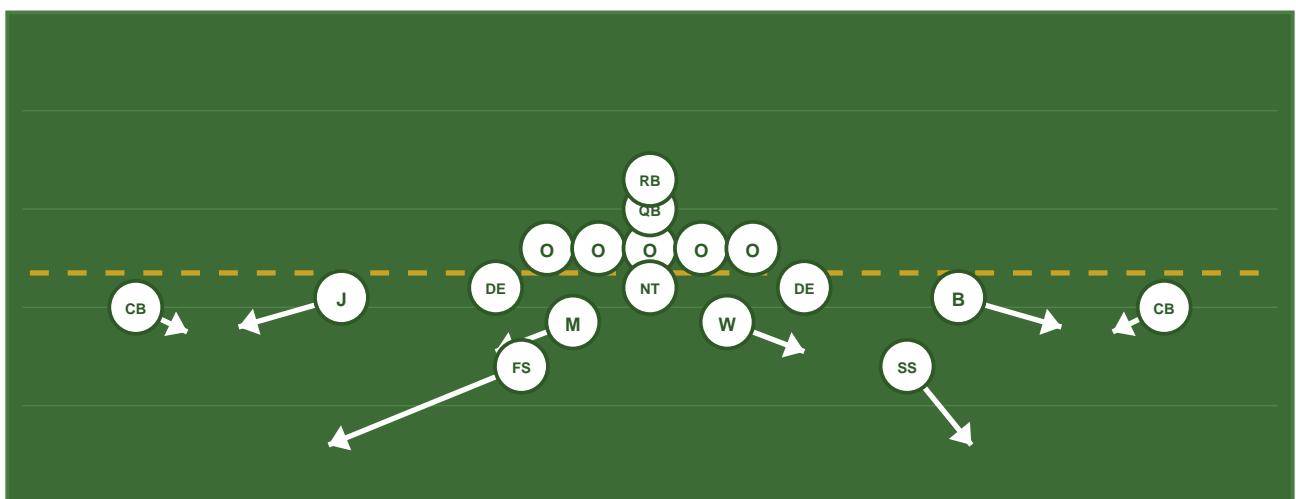


Two-Gap Technique

- NT: Hands inside the center's pads. Lock out, read the flow, shed to the ball.
- Two-gap NT must not get driven off the ball — anchor is everything.
- DEs: Hold your gap. The NT controls the middle so you can set edges.
- ILBs: Free to flow to the ball because the NT occupies the center.

Cover 2 Zone

Two deep safeties each cover a deep half of the field. Five defenders handle the underneath zones. The OLBs drop to the flat zones, ILBs handle the curl/hook areas, and the remaining underneath player (often the strong-side DE or a LB) covers the middle.

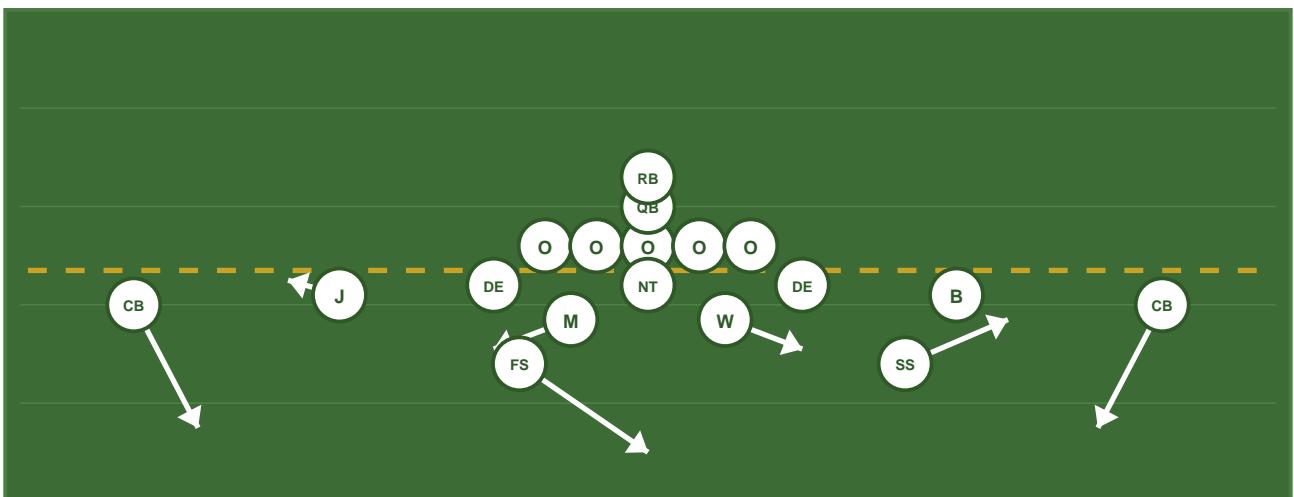


Cover 2 Zone

- Safeties: Align at 12 yards. Cover your deep half, break downhill on throws.
- CBs: Squat on short routes. Re-route the #1 receiver, then sink.
- OLBs: Drop to the flat. Match any receiver who enters your zone.
- Vulnerable to deep middle throws — need the DL to pressure quickly.

Cover 3 Sky

The strong safety rolls down into the flat to become an underneath defender, while the free safety shifts to deep center field. The two corners each play a deep third. This gives the defense an extra defender near the LOS while maintaining three-deep coverage.

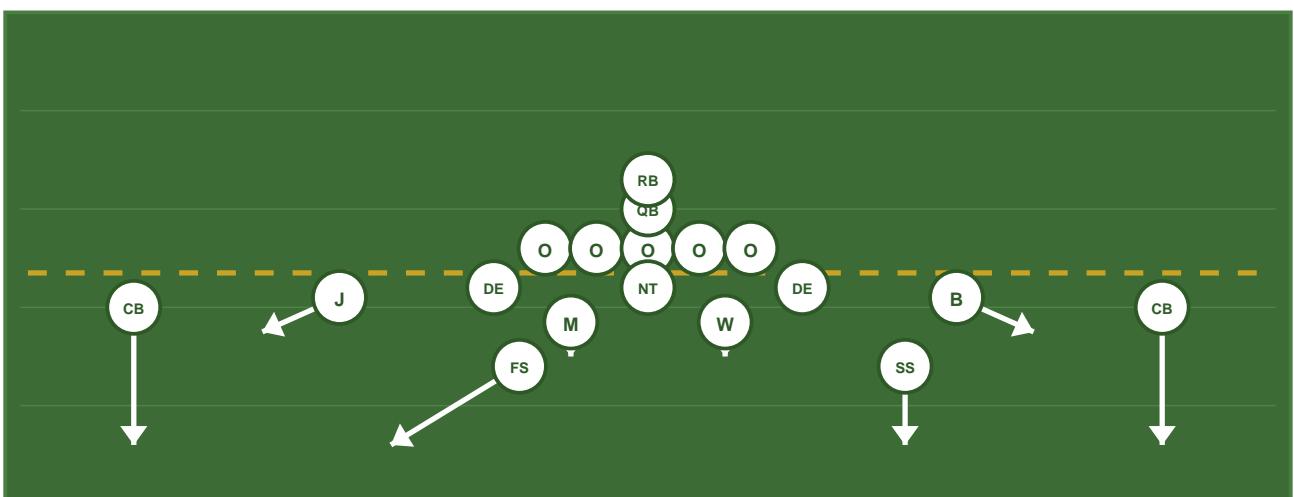


Cover 3 Sky

- SS: Roll down to the flat pre-snap or at the snap. Be aggressive against the run.
- FS: You are the center fielder. Align at 14 yards, read QB, break on the throw.
- CBs: Deep third. Keep everything in front of you.
- This gives you an 8-man box against the run while staying in 3-deep.

Cover 4 (Quarters)

All four defensive backs drop to a deep quarter of the field. Each safety and corner is responsible for one vertical quarter. The linebackers handle all underneath zones. This is a conservative coverage that takes away deep shots and is effective against 4-vertical concepts.

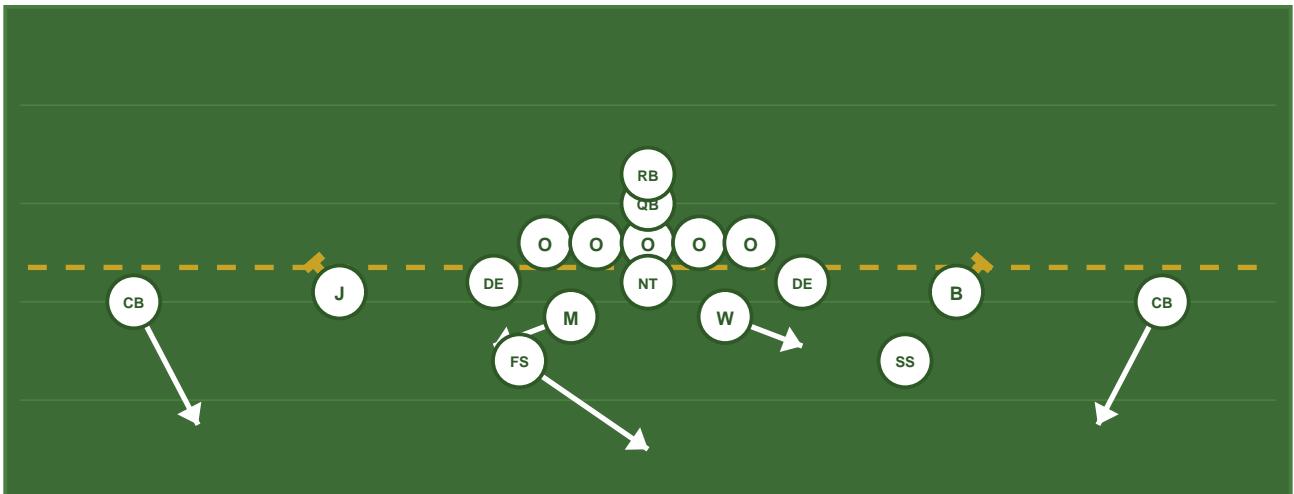


Cover 4 (Quarters)

- CBs: Align at 7-8 yards. Bail to your deep quarter at the snap.
- Safeties: Read #2 receiver to your side. If vertical, carry him. If not, look to help.
- LBs: Wall off underneath routes. You have no deep help in the middle — rally to the ball.
- Excellent against 4 verticals and deep passing concepts.

OLB Edge Rush

Both outside linebackers rush off the edge at the snap, turning the 3-4 front into a simulated 5-man pressure look. The DL occupies blockers while the speed of the OLBs creates pressure from the outside. Coverage behind it adjusts to 3-under, 3-deep.

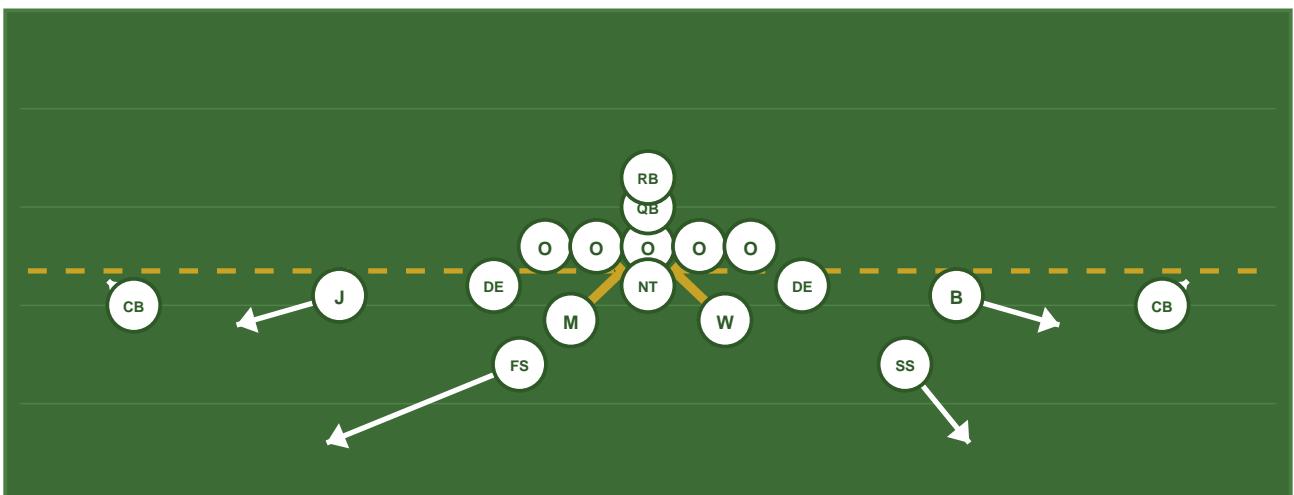


OLB Edge Rush

- OLBs: Attack outside shoulder of the OT. Use speed-to-power or dip-and-rip.
- ILBs: Both drop to underneath zones — curl/hook areas.
- DL: Occupy blockers. Do not let the OL slide to help on the edges.
- This is the base 5-man pressure look. Everyone must know it.

Double A-Gap Blitz

Both inside linebackers creep toward the A-gaps before the snap and fire through them at the snap. This creates immediate interior pressure and chaos for the center and guards. The OLBs drop into coverage behind the pressure.

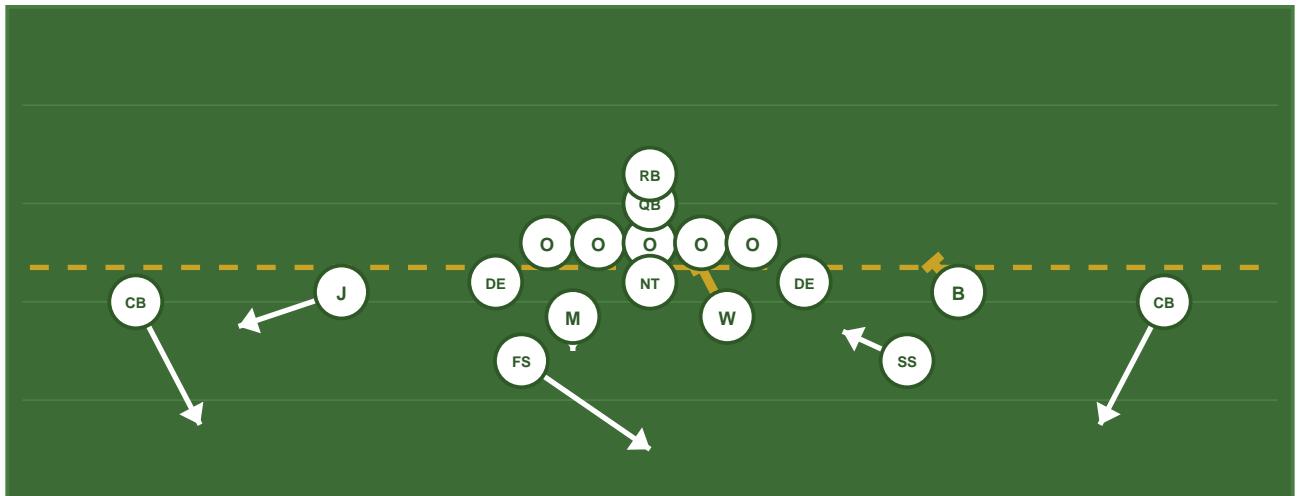


Double A-Gap Blitz

- ILBs: Walk up to the LOS pre-snap. Fire through the A-gaps at the snap.
- NT: Slant to one side to create a lane for one of the ILBs.
- OLBs: Drop to flat zones. You must cover what the ILBs left behind.
- This puts extreme pressure on the center — he cannot block both.

Zone Fire (Fire Zone)

A fire zone blitz bringing 5 rushers while playing 3-deep, 3-under zone coverage behind the pressure. The Buck OLB and an ILB blitz, the Jack OLB drops into a flat zone, and the secondary rotates to cover the deep thirds. Disguise is everything.



Zone Fire (Fire Zone)

- Buck: Attack the edge at the snap. You are the primary pass rusher.
- Will: Fire through the A-gap. Timing with the snap is critical.
- Jack: Drop to the flat zone — replace the coverage left by the blitzers.
- 3-deep, 3-under behind 5 rushers. The key is disguising who is coming.

Quick Reference / Glossary

Two-Gap

A DL technique where the player controls the offensive lineman and is responsible for the gaps on both sides of the blocker.

One-Gap

A DL technique where the player is responsible for penetrating a single gap.

0-Tech / 5-Tech

0=head-up on center, 5=outside shoulder of offensive tackle.

A-Gap Creeper

A late-developing blitz through the A-gap, typically by a safety or linebacker showing coverage pre-snap.

Simulated Pressure

Showing more rushers than actually blitzing to confuse the offensive line protection scheme.

Stack

When linebackers align directly behind defensive linemen, hiding their movement until the snap.

OLB (Outside LB)

Hybrid players in the 3-4 who can rush or drop into coverage on any play.

Overload

Bringing more pass rushers to one side than the offense can block from that side.