
HS 3-4 Defense Playbook

Versatile Odd-Front Defense

Gridiron Encyclopedia

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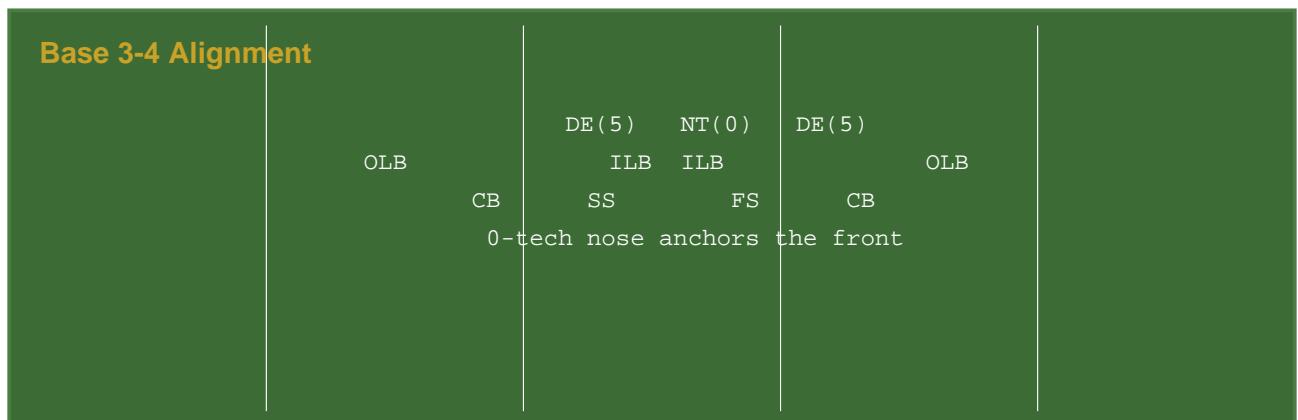
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Philosophy & Overview

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

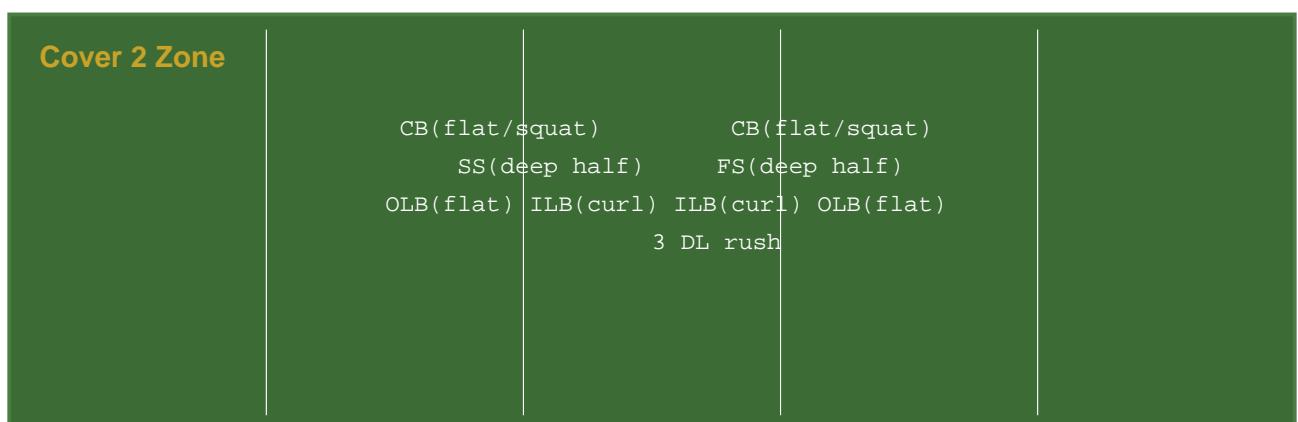
The foundation of the defense. The nose tackle aligns in a 0-technique (head-up on center) and two-gaps. The two defensive ends play 5-techniques (outside shoulder of the offensive tackles). The OLBs align on the edge, and the ILBs stack behind the DL, reading their keys.



- 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.

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.



- 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

CB(deep 1/3)	FS(deep mid)	CB(deep 1/3)
SS(roll to flat)	ILBs(curl/hook)	
OLB(contain)	DL rush	OLB(rush/drop)
SS plays like an extra LB		

- 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.

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

OLB>>>RUSH	DE	NT	DE	OLB>>>RUSH
	ILB(drop)		ILB(drop)	
CB(deep 1/3)	FS(deep mid)	CB(deep 1/3)		
Both OLBs attack edges				

- 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 to maintain zone integrity behind the pressure.

Double A-Gap Blitz

	DE	NT	DE
OLB(drop)	ILB>>A	A<<ILB	OLB(drop)
CB(man)	SS(deep)	FS(deep)	CB(man)
Both ILBs fire through A-gaps			

- 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.

Safety Insert Blitz

The free safety comes on a delayed blitz off the edge, attacking a gap vacated by the offensive line. The corner on that side rotates to deep coverage. This is an A-gap creeper look — the FS walks down late and inserts into the rush.

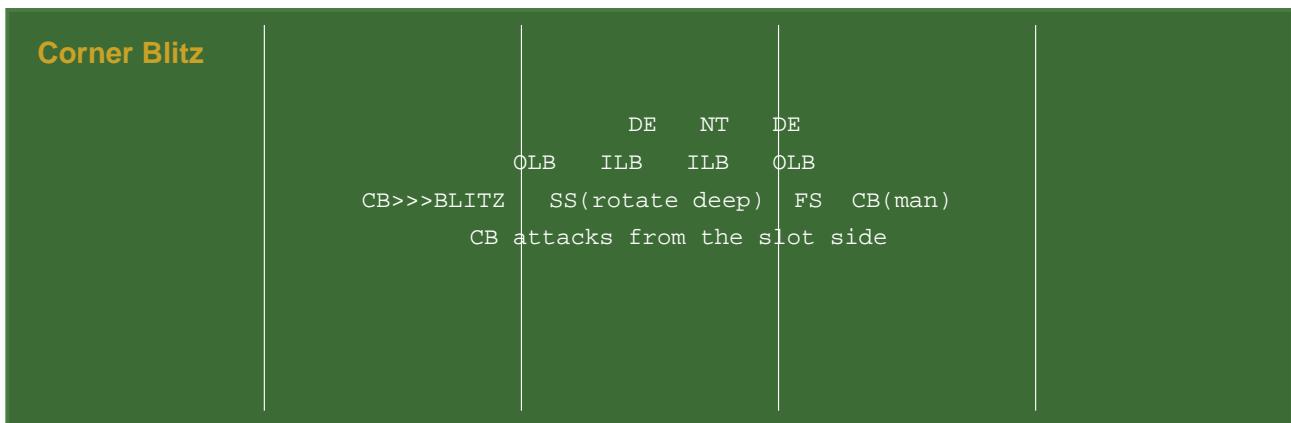
Safety Insert Blitz

	DE	NT	DE
OLB	ILB	ILB	OLB
CB(deep)	SS(deep)	FS>>>BLITZ	CB
FS inserts late from depth			

- FS: Creep up late. Time the snap count. Attack the open gap.
- CB (blitz side): Rotate to deep responsibility at the snap.
- SS: Shift to cover deep middle alone.
- The late movement makes this nearly impossible to pick up pre-snap.

Corner Blitz

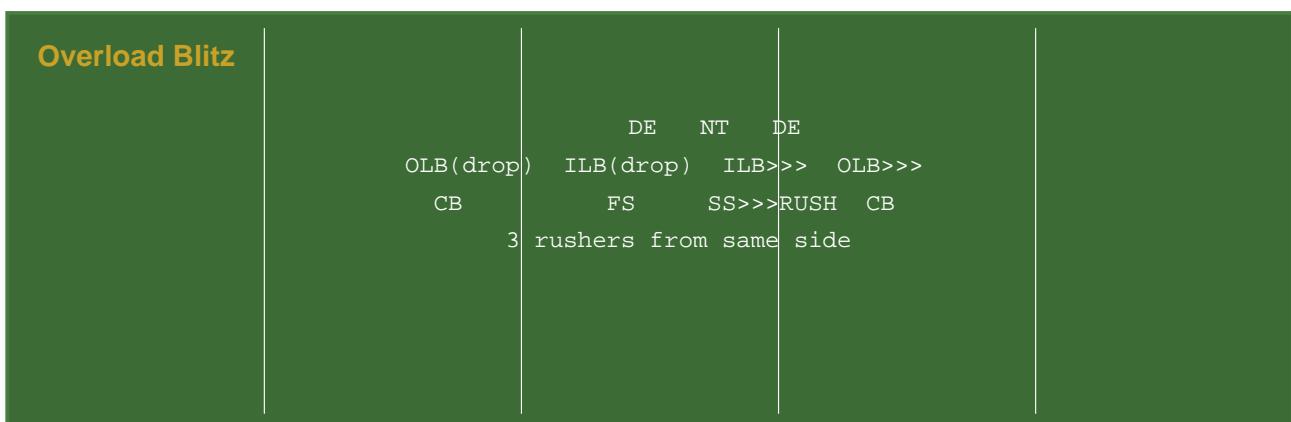
The cornerback blitzes from the slot side, attacking off the edge. The safety rotates to replace the corner in deep coverage. Man coverage is played behind the blitz. This is a highly aggressive call designed for passing downs.



- CB: Time the snap, attack off the edge at full speed. Unblocked rusher.
- SS: Rotate to deep coverage on the blitz side immediately.
- FS: Cover the deep middle.
- Man coverage behind it — everyone locks up their man.

Overload Blitz

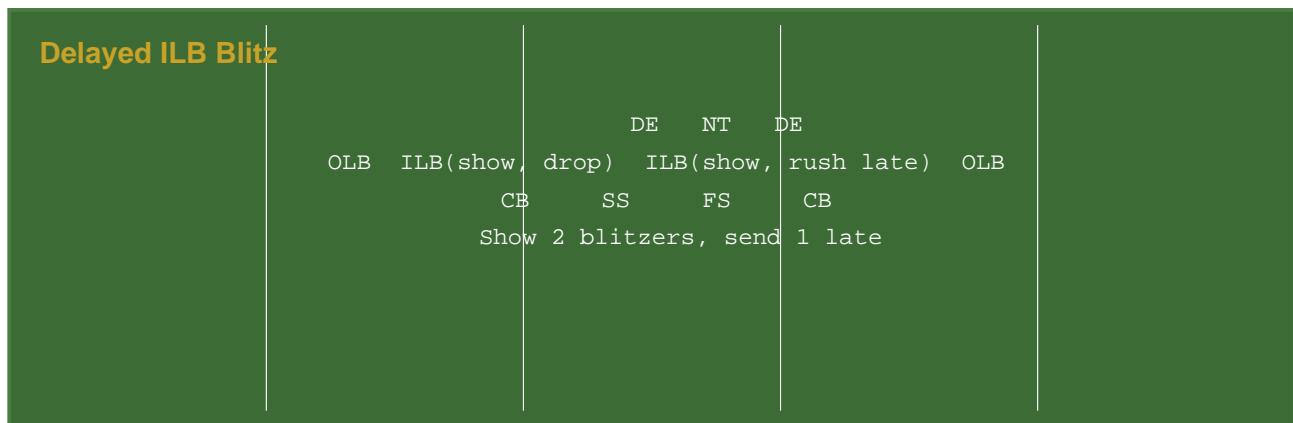
Stack three rushers to one side of the formation: the OLB, an ILB, and the safety all attack from the same side. The offense cannot account for the extra rusher. The other ILB and OLB handle coverage responsibilities on the opposite side.



- OLB (rush side): Outside rush. Force the OT to commit.
- ILB: Attack the B-gap on the overload side.
- SS: Insert as the third rusher. Attack the open gap.
- The offense must account for 3 from one side — slide protection breaks.

Delayed ILB Blitz

Both ILBs show blitz pre-snap by walking toward the LOS. At the snap, one drops into coverage while the other fires through on a delayed rush. The offensive line prepares for both, but one is a fake. This catches the QB off guard as the delayed rusher arrives late.



- Both ILBs: Show blitz pre-snap. Sell the look.
- Drop ILB: At the snap, bail to the hook/curl zone. Cover.
- Rush ILB: Delay one count, then fire. The delayed timing gets home.
- QB thinks the blitz was a fake, then the delayed rusher arrives.

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.