

AFCAMAGAZINE

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GATOR VISION

Dan Mullen, Head Coach, University of Florida

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Navy Strength And
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Vokkero Sets The Standard For Sideline Communication



For the last 15 or 20 years, Jim Ryan used sideline communication systems that never quite met with his expectations.

"I'm old enough to remember wired headsets, where we had to string wires around the stadium and haul wire with you to your opponent's field because not everybody had their stadiums rigged up," says Ryan, head coach of NCAA Division III Rhodes College. "Even after we went wireless, the connections were tough, the batteries had to be charged exactly the right way, and you had to be careful how you handled the entire system from maintenance to setup and use. They could be reliable if you followed the directions, but they could also be sporadic."

When Ryan arrived at Rhodes College, he inherited a sideline communication system that was already 10 years old. It was cutting out on the sideline during use, and its reliability was highly questionable. The system had to be sent back for refurbishing whenever possible. Early in his first season, the system was already malfunctioning.

"I saw an ad for the Vokkero Guardian Coach-To-Coach system, and it looked good," says Ryan. "I called Vokkero and asked to try the system. They shipped us the full setup and the instructions, and they told us to try it out for a week or two. I was so impressed by that, the fact that they would not only let us see it and put our hands on it, but they just said, 'Here you go. Do what you want with it and see how it works.'"

It's that level of confidence that Vokkero has in its own system — in its ease of use and reliability — that really set the company apart in Rhodes' mind.

"The ease of setting it all up on our own was awesome," says Rhodes. "The base station they give you is very user-friendly, and you can configure the headsets however you want. If you want five offense, three defense, you can do that. Or three offense, three defense, two special teams. You can set it up almost literally however you want.

"There's a touchscreen on the configurator and you basically select the options that you want. That configurator doubles as a charging station and doesn't even need to be near the whole system when we're using it. You hit a button and it configures all your headsets, and you see it

happen right there as they charge. And they all charge the same way at the same time. It's a compact system, which helps keep everything together. It's simple and compact."

Real-World Use

One of the things that really sold Rhodes on using the relative newcomer to the sideline communications market is the system's practical usage. He learned that Northwestern University used the system for practices. The Wildcats couldn't use other systems because their practice field is located on Lake Michigan, and the radio waves generated by other systems have nothing to reflect off. They just keep travelling out across the lake. Rhodes called Northwestern's equipment manager to get his opinion on the Vokkero Guardian Coach-To-Coach system.

"He said it was like setting up a cell phone, very easy," says Rhodes. "They use the Vokkero system for practices, because they're easy to set up and they work. So, I figured I have a Division I team using them every day for practice. Those guys don't have any margin for error, so I knew they were going to work pretty well for us."

Rhodes deployed the Vokkero Coach-To-Coach system in his own practices, and found the system intuitive and reliable. Then, he used the system for his first scrimmage of the season, and he was "hooked on them" at that point. His only reservation was, would the system work as well 10 games into the season as they did during his trial run?

"So, we went ahead and bought it, and Vokkero sent us a fresh system," says Rhodes. "We used the system throughout the entire season. They were far-and-away more reliable than anything we've used. Our coaches loved it. The guys who had to set it up, they loved it. There's just not a part about it that I didn't like. I'm really, really glad we made the purchase."

For more information about the Vokkero Guardian Coach-To-Coach sideline communication system, visit <http://www.vokkerousa.com>.





8 Dan Mullen, Head Coach,
University of Florida



Nick Savage, Director of Strength
And Conditioning, University of Florida

FEATURE ARTICLES

8 Gator Vision

The University of Florida's off-season strength and conditioning program prepares student-athletes for the rigors of the season, instilling the confidence and physical ability required to compete for a national championship.

18 From Junior High To College: Developing The Young Athlete In The Team Setting

Long-term athletic development, lasting between eight and 12 years, requires highly refined, flexible programming that establishes the foundation from which athletes can perform for their entire lives.

DEPARTMENTS

6 From The Managing Editor

The Darkness And The Dawn

14 Equipment Management

Be Prepared For Apparel Taxed As Income

28 Athletic Performance

Navy Strong

32 Coaching Philosophy

Be Simple And Coach To Your Players' Strengths

34 Athletic Performance

Developing Leaders In Your Program

40 Sports Science

Mental Toughness ... For Coaches

43 Chalk Talk: Defense

Everyday Defensive Back Drills To Teach Multiple Fundamentals

46 Chalk Talk: Offense

X's & O's: Drills For H-Backs, Tight Ends And Quarterbacks

48 Chalk Talk: Special Teams

Effective Punt Block Techniques

49 Advertisement Index

50 Move The Chains *By Mike Podoll*

When Your Off-Season Strength And Conditioning Game Plan Is Thrown Out The Window



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The Darkness And The Dawn

By Paul Markgraff, Managing Editor, AFCA Magazine

Normally, I don't write these kinds of things. I prefer to work behind the scenes, lubricating the gears of a football-coaching content machine that churns out inexhaustible resources for AFCA members. But, as a good friend of mine recently told me, times are changing right before our very eyes. So shall I change, then.

As I write this column, it is March 17, 2020, the first night of several weeks of "working from home," which was all but mandated by both federal and state authorities. We are currently employing "social distancing," a phrase that only recently cropped up in modern vernacular, created to describe self-imposed, indefinite isolation.

You are likely reading this around May 10, 2020, nearly two-months after I am writing it. For me in March, you are part of some vague future, and based on the events of the last 10 days, it's a future I can't even imagine. Ten days ago on March 7, the entire United States registered only 401 positive cases of infection by the 2019 novel coronavirus, which leads to the disease presently known as COVID-19.

As of this moment, on March 17, Johns Hopkins University reports 6,362 confirmed cases across the U.S. I wonder how many cases Johns Hopkins is reporting on May 10. You can look it up if you want to. I'll just shudder to think.

And yet, that is the pessimist in me. Perhaps the realist, but undoubtedly the pessimist. "Practical me" says hunker down, stay indoors, isolate my family, overreact to the situation, because it's better to overreact and be wrong than it is to do little and secure your downfall. Practical me makes a good point. I'm curious though. Is toilet paper hoarding still a thing in the future? It's a fairly big deal right now and symbolic of people erring on the side of doing something rather than nothing.

The pessimist in me sees the worst-case scenario and plans for the same. Doom and gloom color my world. Ask anyone I know. I keep up with the data. I grok the math. I know the weighted exponential predictions don't look good right now. Frankly, neither do the exponential or polynomial predictions. It's hard being a practical realist these days. I'm generally a bum at parties of fewer than 10 people standing at least 6 feet apart.

Still, there is a huge part of me that knows this too shall pass. Beyond the politicians stoking our righteous indignation in exchange solely for our votes, the talking heads from "the left" and "the right" searching for where next to affix blame, and the internet trolls inevitably exploiting the worst angels of our nature, I know for a fact that even this calamity will end.

I hope we are wiser in the future, and I hope that we can sidestep the deep insecurities we so often cloak in hate, insensitivity and selfish conceit. May we also abandon the willful ignorance that let us sleep at night, right up until it was too late to act quickly.

I know we will be wiser, because I have faith in humans' innate ability to learn from their mistakes and grow. I also believe that our collective faith looms larger than individual fears.

This too I believe:

- Sooner or later, football's coming back.
- I believe you're preparing for it.
- I believe you're forming contingency plans.
- I believe you're collaborating with everyone involved.
- I believe you're completing schedules.
- I believe you're in regular contact with your student-athletes and preparing their parents for the relative uncertainty of the season.
- I believe you're looking through every ad in this magazine to identify vendors who didn't give up on this season, and put their money where their mouth is, even though the situation appeared pretty bleak on March 17, 2020.


I believe in football, and I believe in football coaches.

I was 24 years old when terrorists attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, shoving what was initially a manufacturing slowdown into a full-blown recession. It was a watershed moment. Regular people lost 40 percent in the stock market. Americans looking forward to retirement suddenly found they not only lost their security net, but their employment as well. These early days of the 2019 novel coronavirus remind me very much of how ordinary people sat glued to their TVs day after day after day, entranced by the candlelight vigil of social media's comparatively dignified predecessor.

Nearly 20 years after September 11th, I interviewed Bill Curry, former Georgia Tech head coach and ESPN analyst, for our 2018 AFCA Annual Convention issue. He recalled a conversation he shared with a football fan while passing through the tiny town of Attalla, Ala., shortly after the events of 9/11.

The fan recognized Curry and asked if the weekend's games would be cancelled. After Curry told him the games were off, the fan told him, "In Attalla, Alabama, come Friday night, we're going to play football. Because it means a lot to us."

"Why did it matter in Attalla, Alabama, that we play this often foolish game, with 11 guys on each side running into each other?" Curry asked himself at the time. He soon understood there are towns all over the country just like Attalla counting on this "often foolish" game because it helps them come together as a community. We still need that.

I have no real idea what the next 60 days will bring, but I do know that somewhere down the line – hopefully sometime soon — football will be back. Football is here to stay, because it's central to our collective identity. There's no way this virus is coming into our house and stealing a cheap one from us. We might be down, but we are not out of this game. Stay focused, remain vigilant, do your job, and let's chalk up another W for the home team, together. 

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Gator Vision

The University of Florida's off-season strength and conditioning program prepares student-athletes for the rigors of the season, instilling the confidence and physical ability required to compete for a national championship.

By Paul Markgraff

University of Florida head coach Dan Mullen and director of strength and conditioning Nick Savage know that mental and physical toughness are closely intertwined for any football program with championship aspirations.

The degree to which student-athletes improve their mental and physical toughness throughout the season is directly proportional to a program's ability to overcome adversity and triumph over setbacks.

The football season is the crucible. Into it, coaches pour their knowledge and training while players add their effort and desires. Savage applies the fire that melts all of those elements. What emerges after the first kickoff sails through the warm September air is a new team, the sum of the program's off-season activities, ready to test their mettle against all comers, prepared to find out whether all their focus and energy during the off-season was enough.

"The simple answer is, hey, we're looking for our guys to get bigger, faster and stronger, and like most programs, that is obviously part of it," says Mullen. "But our off-season program is about building mental and physical toughness. Every one of our workouts has a unique purpose. Some of them are about getting bigger, faster and stronger. Some might be about conditioning, some might be about agility and quickness. But most are about developing mental and physical toughness within the program, within the players and within the team.

"During the season, you're going to be tested in a lot of different ways, and one of the critical things you need to be a championship team is great mental and physical toughness. That gets developed during your off-season program."

Mullen calls Savage the head coach of the off-season, for obvious reasons. Because of NCAA rules, Savage is allowed to spend more time with student-athletes than virtually any other coach. Mullen and Savage have been a team since 2016, when Savage joined Mississippi State University, where Mullen was head coach. Since 2013, he has worked with more than 30 student-athletes who have been selected in the NFL draft.

Prior to Mississippi State, Savage worked with several other FBS programs, including the University of Toledo, Ohio State University and Bowling Green State University.

"That term mental toughness gets thrown around a lot, and everyone preaches it," says Savage. "For me, the biggest components of mental toughness are preparation and confidence. Are they in a physical state to meet the demands and rigors of the season. Confidence is where they firmly believe the work and preparation they put in has put them at a competitive advantage to succeed no matter what gets thrown their way. They believe they've been prepared to dominate and win."



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“Don’t give in, no matter how hard the game or the situation is, that adversity is right there in front of you, and no matter how difficult that obstacle may seem, we’re not going to quit or tap out.”

Above And Beyond

Part of learning who you truly are as an athlete is to push beyond limits you previously thought etched in stone. The relationship Mullen and Savage have cultivated is one of mutual respect and trust.

“That professional relationship that we have and the trust between he and I allow us to be extremely successful,” says Mullen. “I think one great metric by which you can judge a strength and conditioning coach is when you look at someone who’s putting you through a workout — sure, you feel uncomfortable and out of your element or you might even shed a tear along with your sweat — but you can tell he’s pushing you to your mental and physical limits. But at the same time, you know that the coach loves and respects you at the same time.”

Mullen says that Florida student-athletes respect Savage because of what he shows them they can accomplish. Savage isn’t just some coach making them bigger, faster and stronger; he’s somebody that pushes people to their max and teaches people how to give maximum effort in everything they do, pushing them almost beyond what they think their limits are.

“Those athletes he pushes have great respect for him and they love him,” says Mullen. “You can sit there and talk to our players about [Savage] and you can hear it in how they talk about their personal relationship with him. They come to trust him. If our athletes have a problem, he’s one of the first people they turn to. When he talks, they listen, because he’s shown them they can be greater than they think they are. I think that is really how you measure a strength and conditioning coach.”

Savage is intentional in his desire to push athletes beyond their preconceived notions of their own limits.

“In the grand scheme of things, we develop their confidence by pushing them to stay where they believe they’ve gone as far as they can, but our job is to actually show them that there’s more in the tank, so to speak,” says Savage. “It’s not all from Day 1. You take small steps and it’s gradual. I want them to have success, but I also want to give them things where they experience failure because they will learn from that too. Through preparation in the off-season, we’re going to push them in a physical state and overload them, then allow their bodies to adapt.”

Savage says that as their bodies adapt to the training, the mind adapts right along with it. Things that seemed difficult during week one have become very easy for them by week six.

This way of thinking translates easily to the game of football. It’s probably an oversimplification, but there is really only one rule to this mental toughness game as it relates to football.

Don’t you dare quit.

“Don’t give in, no matter how hard the game or the situation is, that adversity is right there in front of you, and no matter how difficult that obstacle may seem, we’re not going to quit or tap out,” says Savage. “That’s the game of football, and we live it as 4th and inches every single day. Everything is 4th and inches; it doesn’t matter if it’s offense or defense. What are you going to do to defend or take that land right in front of you? It’s one of those things our program is built on. Sure, we build our physical toughness, but that right there is all mental.”

Savage says one other way to keep the definition of mental toughness simple is by doing what you’re supposed to do when you are supposed to do it the way you’re supposed to do it at the intensity needed to win the game.

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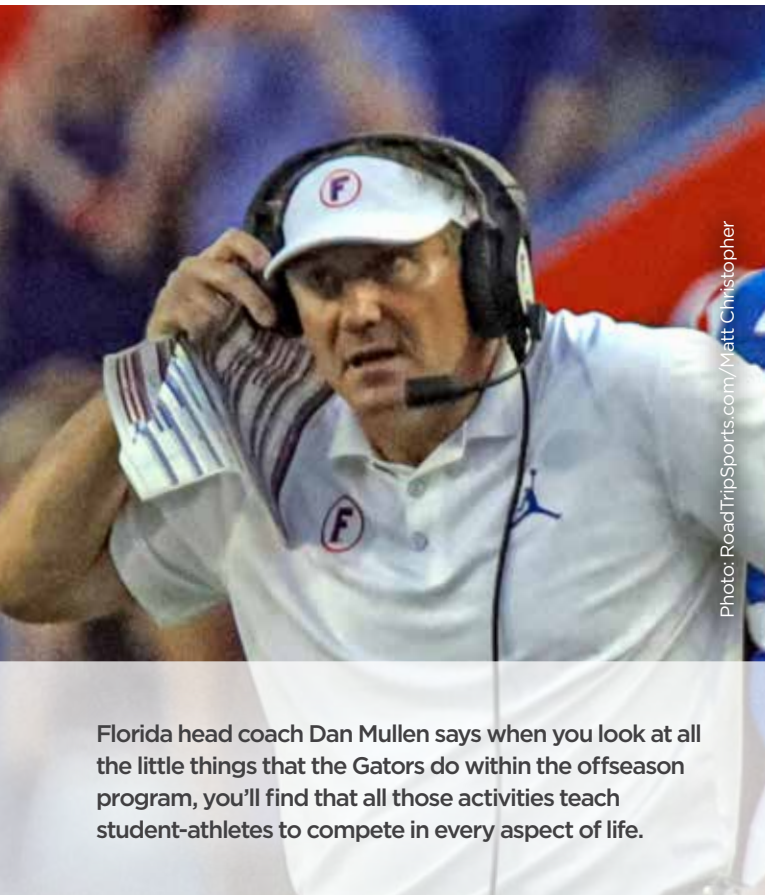
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Florida head coach Dan Mullen says when you look at all the little things that the Gators do within the offseason program, you'll find that all those activities teach student-athletes to compete in every aspect of life.

"It's little things like that, having that discipline to do it the right way," says Savage. "Because we all know that the average person in this world doesn't have the mental toughness to sustain that. If you look at really successful people, they're successful because they put themselves in situations that the average person doesn't. Then they make the commitment and sacrifice necessary to succeed. That's a rare thing."

Competitive Development

Doing it the right way is one thing, but doing it the right way amid constant competitive pressure is another. For the Gators, competition and development are two sides of the same coin.

"The competitive aspect of our program is very different," says Mullen. "Everything we do is a competition. You don't ever just run agility drills; you always compete against someone else in agility drills. There's always a winner and a loser. For example, this morning, they were with their off-season teams. We have a variety of competitive drills each team must complete to finish the workout. The team that finishes first gets points. Whoever finishes last gets the least number of points. This is an example of constant competition, and you'll see mental toughness shine through in that."

If an athlete misses a class, he loses points for his team. If he does community service, he gains points for his team. When the team performs agility drills, it's not just

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about getting your hand down on the line. If he knocks over a cone, he loses a point for his team. If he wins the race, he gets a point for his team.

“When you look at all the little things that we do within the off-season program, you’ll find that they teach our guys to compete in every aspect of life,” says Mullen. “They may think they’re just trying to win

or 15 years down the line, at some point, it’s going to end. I always ask myself, are we setting these guys up with the tools to have success for the rest of their lives. Our guys have to hold up their end of the bargain too, but are we preparing them for success in whatever they choose to do?”

It’s a question that guides Savage day-in and day-out as he seeks to

“The competitive aspect of our program is very different. Everything we do is a competition. You don’t ever just run agility drills; you always compete against someone else in agility drills. There’s always a winner and a loser...”

one race or earn Gatorade at the end of a drill instead of a gasser. That might not seem like they’re focused on anything but the short term, but in the long run, we’re teaching our players to compete in everything they do.

“That translates extremely well to life. When they graduate, if anyone is lucky enough to have the opportunity to go to the NFL, they’re competing every single day just to keep their job. If they’re working on Wall Street, they’re competing in sales. Everything we do in life, we’re competing, and so we teach our guys to have that mindset. Whatever it is you’re doing, you’re trying to maximize yourself and you’re trying to win.”

For Savage, it boils down to development. It’s a word he uses to sum up everything he does for his student-athletes, and it applies to individual personalities, academics, strength training, physical development, you name it. If you’re not developing as a human being, you’re moving backwards.


“At some point, football is going to end for everyone,” says Savage. “Whether that’s in three or four years

prepare his football team and instill the confidence necessary to succeed even when the chips are down.

“There are things in this program where we tell the kids specifically why we’re doing what we’re doing from the outset,” says Savage. “Then there are other things — certain exercises or rep schemes — where we don’t tell them why at the beginning.”

On those days when athletes don’t necessarily understand the “why” of it all, that’s when they show their true colors.

“The point of this is they’re not always going to be in control of their environment or their atmosphere,” says Savage. “Maybe they’re on the field at an away game with 107,000 screaming fans and it’s pouring rain. They have no control over that, but the objective is still the same. Can they be at their best and do everything right when the pressure is on, no matter what is going on around them?”

Months before the season begins, no one knows the answer to that question. Only time will tell. But that, as they say, is why we play the games. 



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Equipment Management: Be Prepared For Apparel Taxed As Income

Photo: RoadTripSports.com/Kendall Webb

The University of Louisville was recently found to owe the Internal Revenue Service about \$83,000 in back taxes on university apparel, a situation that was surprising to many within the university. A little-known law identifying apparel as fringe benefits may expose the majority of universities to a similar situation.

By Paul Markgraff

As the federal government rolls out \$2 trillion in emergency funding to deal with the 2019 novel coronavirus, it's a fair assertion that the IRS will be tasked with finding every last dollar for the federal treasury it possibly can.

Whether coaches know it or not, federal tax law currently identifies "work clothes and uniforms" as excluded from wages – or a fringe benefit – if it is "specifically required as a condition of employment and [is] not worn or adaptable to general usage as ordinary clothing."

Internal Revenue Code section (IRC) 61 provides that gross income means all income from whatever source derived, including compensation in the form of fringe benefits. There is no exclusion for athletic clothing provided to coaches or assistant coaches, and the value of a fringe benefit is taxable unless there is a specific regulation that excludes it.

This is not a hypothetical situation, either. During a 2016-2017 audit at the University of Louisville, the IRS found that the university owed \$43,253.99 in unpaid taxes on athletic clothing for the tax year 2014 and \$39,714.64 in unpaid taxes on athletic clothing for tax year 2015, for a total of \$82,968.63 in unpaid taxes on about \$200,000 worth of University of Louisville clothing.

The reality is, the vast majority of universities do not collect taxes from coaches or pay taxes to the federal government on the apparel given to staffers of the athletic

department. And because that apparel can easily be worn off the clock, it must be considered a fringe benefit.

"When I came back to the university after a few years away running my own business, this was one of my top priorities," says Chuck Hall, director of equipment operations for the University of Louisville. "I'd been doing this for 16 years as a head equipment guy and it had never been an issue; actually, it was sort of one of the perks of working in athletics. You get shirts; you get gear. It's just a company shirt. At least, that's what we all thought, but obviously, we were wrong."

Get Tracking

Very quickly upon his return to Louisville, Hall needed to source inventory management software that could "do everything." The right software would keep track of all athletic department inventory, but it would also track taxation values and provide monthly reports required by campus personnel responsible for insurance and financial tracking for athletic department staffers.

Hall remembered meeting with a company called ACS Athletics (now Front Rush) at a prior AFCA Convention that intrigued him because they were web-based and seemed capable of handling all these disparate needs. On top of that, they were willing to work with him to build out the taxation aspect of the software he would need to track apparel valuation, and consequently, the amount of taxes coaches would need to pay.

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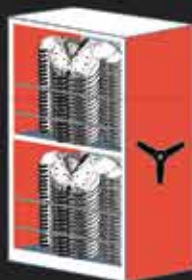
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Photo: RoadTripSports.com/Kendall Webb

Coaches need to understand that this isn't something new. This law has been on the books for quite some time. It would be best to take this in stride and don't blame the equipment manager.

"There may have been a tax law on the books, but there was no book telling us how to deal with it in athletics," says Hall. "So, we just basically made it up as we went. I just kept asking questions of our campus people and business office personnel. What do you need? What do you expect it to look like? Where are you trying to go with it? Then I would take those answers back to ACS Athletics and show them. It was a work in progress."

Over time, Hall and ACS Athletics built a system that would track taxation on apparel, thereby abiding by federal law. These days, the university has no wiggle room, compared to other universities blissfully ignorant of these laws. Now that Louisville has been "slapped on the wrist," they can no longer play the "we just didn't know" card, and frankly, it is unclear how long playing that card will work for other universities.

"Going forward, we have to be perfect," says Hall. "That's a tough standard to meet, but it's our job, and it's a change that everyone will have to make eventually, because Uncle Sam is going to want his money."

How It Works

Hall's process is relatively straightforward. All apparel that coaches receive is taxable unless they return it after use. When a new coach comes in to Louisville, the human resources department informs him or her about the tax situation with clothing, tickets and other fringe benefits.

"Then, we give them a book at the beginning of each year with everything we ordered the previous year for the upcoming year," says Hall. "Then in June, before coaches head out on their vacations and after their high school camps conclude, they'll go through our book and circle

anything they want, knowing that whatever they circle is going to be taxed."

When July comes around and football coaches are preparing for training camp, Hall has already received his inventory, labelled it for each coach and placed it in their lockers. Coaches aren't waiting in line, selecting items on-the-fly. There are complications, for sure. Maybe something doesn't fit right. In that case, Hall has to check the apparel back into his system and mark them as within his inventory and non-taxable for the coach who ordered it.

"Based on that, our business office runs a monthly tax report for the upcoming month's payroll," says Hall. "About a week before payroll runs, staff members receive a printout that shows how much apparel they've requisitioned and they have two days to dispute it or approve it. Then payroll goes through and the taxes are deducted from their paycheck and the world goes on. Our apparel is valued at retail prices, so that is what coaches are taxed on."

At Louisville, Hall says coaches can basically estimate the amounts they pay in taxes with a simple 30 percent rule. If a pair of shoes is valued at \$90 retail, that means about \$27 will be coming off the coach's check if he chose that pair of shoes during the selection process.

On The Same Team

While it's a fairly straightforward system, it represents an enormous change to "business as usual" within the athletic department. Coaches need to be aware that just because this change has taken place, it's not the equipment managers who have chosen to implement it.

It's key here for coaches to look at the bright side and not blame the equipment staff. This is not their fault. Sure, coaches could look at it like it's a 30 percent ding on a pair of shoes, but remember, this law is already on the books and has been for some time. It would be better for coaches to view this as a 70 percent discount on their new shoes.

"One of the biggest problems we face is that these changes hurt the relationships between the equipment managers and the coaching staffs of all sports," says Hall. "For as long as I can remember, coaches have been getting apparel for free, and now all of a sudden, they're getting taxed for it. It hurts because now they're looking at us like we're 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. But, it's not our decision."

The relationship between coaches and equipment managers is a key relationship, especially in our current climate of staph, MRSA and now, COVID-19. It's critical that coaches and equipment managers maintain their great relationships, because we're all going to need each other a lot more before we can be sure that we're all safe and sound, all of our equipment is wiped down, all of our laundry is clean, and we're all wearing university apparel that maybe is no longer free of charge, but it is free of microbial invaders. **AFCA**



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From Junior High To College: Developing The Young Athlete In The Team Setting



Photo: Del Valle (Texas) ISD

Long-term athletic development, lasting between eight and 12 years, requires highly refined, flexible programming that establishes the foundation from which athletes can perform for their entire lives.

By Reb Brock, CSCS, Director of Strength & Conditioning, Del Valle (Texas) Independent School District

Prior to the early 1990s, information and science on strength training in the United States was scarce. And then the “Wall” of communism came down and training information began to pour into the West from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. Strength coaches were scouring through information from eastern sport scientists like Bompa, Zatsiorsky and Verkhoshansky to gain an edge from the “training secrets” of the east.

According to Dr. V.M. Zatsiorsky in his book *Science And Practice Of Strength Training*, Long-Term Athletic Development (LTAD) of elite athletes requires a period of 8-12 years of training. From this statement, it becomes obvious that the development of an athlete will require a well-designed, flexible plan that sets a strong foundation and builds over time.

With this at the crux of my training philosophy, the following information walks through a six-year program currently used from 7th grade through 12th grade at Del Valle (Texas) Independent School District. It has roots in the LTAD concepts of the eastern sports scientists and has continually evolved over the past 25 years. There are many programs you can choose to implement, but to be effective, it must align with your philosophy and you must know your “why.”

Overcoming Inertia

At the junior high and high school level, most sports are power sports: football, basketball, baseball/softball, track and field, volleyball, soccer, and more. Although each has

different components and energy system requirements, they all have a power component to them. They all require the athlete to use explosive power to run, jump, propel implements, and accelerate/decelerate when rapidly changing direction.

Many high school athletes are also multisport athletes, transitioning year-round from one sport to the next. Consequently, there may be some exercise changes based on the individual needs of the athlete or from one sport to the next, such as limited overhead movements during the season for baseball, softball, volleyball and football quarterbacks. However, the base template will remain much the same.

The most important aspect of training an athlete begins with movement, especially when coaching the young athlete. Many things have changed in the world in the last 30 years. Kids growing up in the 60s, 70s and 80s had little to no video games, computers or smart phones. At school, young people had multiple recess periods as well as daily physical education (PE) classes. After school, they were riding bikes, playing tackle football, pick-up basketball or sandlot baseball, depending on the season. From dawn 'til dusk, kids were outside moving and playing.

Today, this is not the case. Recess periods and PE classes are limited during the school day; kids don't play outside but rather sit in front of some type of screen for incredible lengths of time on a daily basis. One result of this sedentary lifestyle is most young athletes have poor posture. This combined with uninformed athletes solely focusing on



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- Cart clamp available to facilitate use on any cart

SNAP ATTACK FEATURES

- Pivots instantly to throw right- and left-handed passes, kickoffs and punts to any location on the field (on elevated stand)
- At realistic angles it snaps ball to any depth in shotgun and pistol formations, extra points and punts (on snapping stand)
- Solid polyurethane throwing wheels firmly grip the ball for accurate ball placement
- Safe design includes wheel guards that protect arms from potential wheel burns
- Cart clamp available to facilitate use on any cart



A training plan is like a puzzle. A puzzle has many pieces that must fit together; they cannot be forced into place. If a piece of the puzzle is missing, the finished product has a hole in it and the picture is incomplete.

developing the anterior muscles, such as the chest, anterior deltoid, arms and quads, contributes to greater muscular imbalance issues. Even in the case of kids who are athletes, they are nowhere near as active as in the past. Free play has been replaced with structured sports specialization. This is producing kids that are one-dimensional in terms of their overall athleticism and foundational locomotion and coordination.

The result is many kids do not develop basic coordination or movement patterns as kids did in the past. Jumping rope, hopping, galloping, skipping and simply running are not learned or practiced with adequate frequency.

Developing The Complete Athlete

As a strength coach, the intention is to develop the most complete athlete possible. You are not building a bodybuilder, a powerlifter, or an Olympic weightlifter, though developing a well-rounded athlete will use components from all three types of training.

The foundation of the program emphasizes explosive ground-based movements, such as:

- **Olympic:** Clean and Snatch variations increase power.
- **Powerlifting:** Squats, pulls and the bench press develop absolute strength, although they also will be performed dynamically during certain workouts.
- **Bodybuilding:** Various multi-joint movements and some single-joint exercises increase strength in individual muscle groups where weaknesses are present and build muscular balance.

The utilization of both vertical and horizontal pulling movements improve the overall development of the upper-

back muscles. In recent years, an increase in the volume of pulling to pushing has become necessary to overcome imbalances and posture issues of today's young athlete. In the current program, the ratio of pulling to pushing movements is at a minimum 3:1.

Lower body training follows much the same ratio with approximately 67 percent pulling/posterior chain-centered exercises (various pulls) and 33 percent pushing (squatting). Another component that comes in to play on lower body work are single leg movements. In all sports the athlete plays a significant part of the game with only one foot in contact with the ground at any given moment; therefore, it is important to develop unilateral strength. This also addresses any present, underlying muscular imbalances.

Specific movement or stability deficiencies will be addressed by adding necessary mobility exercises to improve basic movement and rehab modalities to improve foundational stability.

Babies first crawl, then stand, then take a few steps, progressing to walking and eventually running. Training an athlete is much the same. They cannot run and jump until they can walk. Building a solid foundation of movement, coordination and basic strength prior to advanced programming is fundamental.

A training plan is like a puzzle. A puzzle has many pieces that must fit together; they cannot be forced into place. If a piece of the puzzle is missing, the finished product has a hole in it and the picture is incomplete. The same becomes true of an athlete whose training program did not build a solid foundation or progressed too quickly, skipping crucial steps of the development process along the way.

In-Game Analytics: Coach With Confidence

EdjVarsity helps coaches determine win probably at any point during the live game, and it's turned at least one self-confessed old-school coach into a believer in new-school analytics.

Steve Specht will be the first to admit he's an old-school coach. He's heading into his 30th year as a coach, and he says he operates mostly by feel. The head coach at St. Xavier (Ohio) High School in Cincinnati knew what analytics were because he was approached on several occasions by suppliers with an interest in bringing the concept of analytics to his program's football field.

"Nothing ever really transpired from it," says Specht. "But it got me to thinking. I hired a new offensive coordinator last year — Andrew Coverdale — who is major-league analytics. He talked to me about it too. One thing led to another and EdjSports contacted us. I'm open to new ideas. I think if you don't study 'the new,' you get your tail kicked in this game."

Whether it's new training systems, nutrition, surveys, analytics, or heart-rate variability, Specht is always willing to give something new a try. While he wouldn't exactly describe himself as an early-adopter, he says he tries to stay on the front edge of whatever's going on.

"I'm not going to profess to be the smartest individual in the world. But I'm smart enough to know I need to hire people smarter than I am, and I need to study and try to stay on the front edge," says Specht. "So that's kind of the path that brought us to EdjSports and working with them and where we are today."

Getting Started

Anthony "AJ" Jones was the first person from EdjSports to make the trip out to St. Xavier in Cincinnati. AJ is Vice President of EdjSports Team Business, and he knows his way around an analytics panel. Before he rolled out the EdjVarsity platform for Specht and his staff one afternoon, he just talked about analytics scenarios and Specht was intrigued.

"When we sat down, he took me through a couple scenarios that really made me think," says Specht.

AJ presented a situation in which an opponent led by 14 with just six minutes to go in the game. In this scenario, Specht's offense is down by 14 with six minutes to go in the game, and they score a touchdown, cutting the lead to 8. The analytics say that Specht should go for two on this touchdown, and here's

why. Specht's offense still needs to score another touchdown, no matter what. By going for two on the initial touchdown — a 50/50 play for Specht's special teams unit — Specht gives his team an additional opportunity for a two-point conversion. If he makes it, he only needs a score and PAT to win. If he misses the conversion, he will still have a chance to tie with a two-

point conversion on the second touchdown. Had he kicked the PAT on the first touchdown, he effectively limits his ability to win the game.

"I didn't agree with him, but he intrigued me enough to think, 'I ought to look into this,'" says Specht. "And the more we thought about it and talked about it, the more we thought we should at least give this try. Even though, honestly, at this point in my career, I'm kicking that field goal, but forcing myself to run through the various scenarios in my mind and think critically about them, that is one of the biggest things EdjVarsity has delivered. Like I said, I'm old school, but this forced me to think."

Growing With The Game

Old school? New school? The label didn't matter, because

regardless of labels, EdjVarsity made Specht think about how he coaches. His normal three or four possible adjustments he would make during a given game blossomed into countless opportunities to adjust and change the game.

"Those adjustments are all pre-planned," says Specht. "With analytics, it's all happening in real time. It's so fast that all of a sudden, you have new scenarios you come up with that suddenly become part of that pre-planning discussion. If it makes sense, it gets added to your work during the week. Then the next week, there are even more situations you never thought could happen. Then you start thinking about situations that, even if they don't happen, they help you understand what's possible. That's one of the big positives for me. This has forced me to look at the game in new ways, analyze it and think critically about it. For an old-school guy like me, that has been priceless."

For more information about the EdjVarsity platform from EdjSports, visit EdjVarsity.com.



edjsports

To see Steve Specht, head coach of St. Xavier (Ohio) High School, discuss his success with the EdjVarsity platform from EdjSports, visit afcainsider.com/specht

Analysis, Assessment And Program Logistics

Before you can develop a program for an athlete or group of athletes, you need to first assess their specific needs by completing a needs analysis and a movement assessment. The analysis and assessment information

will determine which exercises best meet the athlete’s needs based on the equipment available to you. When working in a team setting, the following questions must be answered:

1. Is there enough space available to safely train the number of athletes?
2. How much and what equipment is available?
3. Are there enough qualified coaches to teach technique so your athletes can train safely and effectively?
4. What is the level of movement, coordination and body awareness possessed by the athletes?

SIX YEAR PLAN

1

LEVEL I PROGRAM
7TH GRADE

Basic strength & bodyweight movements with focus on mobility and exercise technique

2

LEVEL II PROGRAM
8TH GRADE

Refinement of technique, progression to loaded movements and increases in training volume

3

LEVEL III PROGRAM
9TH GRADE

Continued technical refinement and introduction of more advanced movements

4

LEVEL IV PROGRAM
10TH-12TH GRADE

More advanced movements/combination of linear periodization and concurrent training

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It is important to remember when training in a team setting there is no such thing as a perfect world; there will always be obstacles. It is in these situations you learn to think outside the box and, through repeated tweaks to the program over time, develop a quality and effective program. Continue to evaluate, adjust and modify as you go. Over time, programming is based on originating concepts and premises but is constantly evaluated, modified and improved.

The Six-Year Plan

The program is multi-levelled — levels 1 through 4 — and is multi-layered with progression/regressions from body weight to complex weighted versions of the exercises. The progressions/regressions allow for individual modifications to the primary exercises within a level determined by the individual needs of the athlete. All 7th-grade athletes and athletes new to the program will be assessed with a Mobility-Strength-Coordination screen which is a modified functional movement screen (scored 0 to 3). Seventh grade athletes will begin training on Level 1.

Once assessed, athletes in 8th through 12th grade who are new to the program will begin training on the level (2-4) that corresponds with their competition level. The program will be modified by exercise as necessary to meet the needs and abilities of the athlete. The exercise progression/regressions also allow injured athletes to train on the team workout while still meeting their individual needs. Throughout the program, regardless of level, the foundational concepts will apply, and every movement pattern can be independently progressed or regressed as necessary.



MOBILITY-STRENGTH-COORDINATION SCREEN

- 1 **OVERHEAD SQUAT (WITH PVC)**
Assessment of mobility throughout the body
- 2 **WALKING LUNGE (BODYWEIGHT)**
Assessment of mobility in ankle, knee & hip
- 3 **LOCOMOTOR SKILLS**
Assessment of coordination
- 4 **FRONT RACK POSITION**
Assessment of shoulder and thoracic spine mobility
- 5 **PUSH-UP**
Assessment of ability and strength
- 6 **OVERHEAD MOBILITY**
Assessment of shoulder mobility


Example Of Level 4 Off-Season Football Program

Each training session will begin with a dynamic warm-up, mobility/stability movements, CNS primers and movement-pattern refinement. These exercises are referred as Mobility, Stability, and Activation.

An example would be prior to a primary leg emphasis training session, the athletes will perform the following series of mobility and glute activation exercises: Over-Under Hurdle Drills, multi-directional Monster Band Walks, and Hip Bridge variation.

Our current Level 4 program for football (primarily sophomore-senior athletes) is three-day-per-week total body

program based on concurrent training. Four-person groups rotate through four exercises per rotation.

There are many programs that a coach can implement to develop his athletes. The strength coach must decide what concepts best fit their philosophy, works best within their logistical situation and answers their “why.” The above described processes, program concepts and philosophy have been utilized successfully with multiple sports in multiple high schools for the past 25 years. I hope you have gleaned at least one idea from this article that will be of assistance in your programming. 

DAY ONE MONDAY

All sets are on a timer with 30 seconds work allotment followed by 12 second transition period

	STATION 1	STATION 2	STATION 3	STATION 4
ROTATION	1 Deep Goblet Squat	T-Spine Mobility Twists	Muscle Clean(5)/Front Squat(5)	Tuck Jumps (CNS)
	2 Cleans from floor (major movement)	Rotator Cuff Complex (M/S/A)	Max Effort STLJ x 3 reps(CNS)	Lockout Push-ups
	3 Upper Body Press (Dynamic)	Vertical Pull	Horizontal Pull	Spotter/Recovery Station
	4 Deep Goblet Squat	Glute-Ham Raise(Posterior Chain)	Posterior Deltoid/Upper Back	Single Leg movement

ROTATION 1 2 Sets x 10 Reps each

ROTATION 2 Major movement 4-5 sets of the prescribed number of repetitions. Secondary movements 4-5 sets of 3-12 repetitions

ROTATION 3 4 sets of 5-12 repetitions per exercise

ROTATION 4 4-5 sets of 5-10 repetitions depending on exercise

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DAY TWO WEDNESDAY

All sets are on a timer with 30 seconds work allotment followed by 12 second transition period

	STATION 1	STATION 2	STATION 3	STATION 4
ROTATION	1 Deep Goblet Squat	Muscle Snatch(5)/OH Squat (5)	Bodyweight Reverse Lunge	Single Leg Hip Bridge
	2 Squat (Max Effort)	Rotator Cuff Complex (M/S/A)	Tuck Jumps (CNS)	Spotter/Recovery Station
	3 DB Press (Repetition)	Vertical Pull	Horizontal Pull	Walking Bear Crawl
	4 Clean Pull from floor (Dynamic)	Rev. Back Extension (Posterior Chain)	Farmer's Carry (Work Capacity)	Eccentric Pull-ups (General Strength)

ROTATION 1 2 Sets x 10 Reps each

ROTATION 2 Major movement 4-5 sets of the prescribed number of repetitions. Secondary movements 4-5 sets of 10-12 repetitions

ROTATION 3 4 sets of 10-12 repetitions per exercise

ROTATION 4 4-5 sets of 5-10 repetitions depending on exercise

DAY THREE FRIDAY

All sets are on a timer with 30 seconds work allotment followed by 12 second transition period

	STATION 1	STATION 2	STATION 3	STATION 4
ROTATION	1 Deep Goblet Squat	T-Spine Mobility Twists	Muscle Clean(5)/Front Squat(5)	Tuck Jumps (CNS)
	2 Cleans from thigh (Dynamic)	Rotator Cuff Complex (M/S/A)	Muscle Snatch(5)/OH Squat(5)	Lockout Push-ups
	3 Bench Press (Max Effort)	Vertical Pull	Horizontal Pull	Spotter/Recovery Station
	4 Sumo Deadlift (Dynamic/Posterior Chain)	Vertical Press (Repetition)	Waiter's Carry (Work capacity)	Horizontal Pull (General Strength)

ROTATION 1 2 Sets x 10 Reps each

ROTATION 2 Major movement 4-5 sets of the prescribed number of repetitions. Secondary movements 4-5 sets of 5-12 repetitions

ROTATION 3 4 sets of 10-12 repetitions per exercise

ROTATION 4 4-5 sets of 3-10 repetitions depending on exercise

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PERFORMANCE IN CONTEXT

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Navy Strong

Photo: Navy Football/United States Naval Academy

Bryan Fitzpatrick is a sponge. He soaks up the best of what his experience has provided and uses it, along with a strong dose of sincerity and authenticity, to motivate and train some of the best young men this country has to offer.

By Paul Markgraff

The month of May used to be unique for the United States Naval Academy football program. Instead of training with coaches for the upcoming season, Midshipmen hit the road, conducting three weeks of military obligation off-site.

“I won’t see them at all,” says Bryan Fitzpatrick, associate athletic director for sports performance and head strength and conditioning coach for football at Navy. “It puts pressure on June and July, but our student-athletes get a chance to figure out what they want to do with their careers. Some of them may be on a ship. Some of them may be on a submarine. Some of them may be down at Quantico training with the Marines or out in San Diego if they qualified for SEAL training. There are a wide variety of things going on.”

But none of it has to do with getting ready for the football season.

Sound familiar?

Right now in America, training for football season is an “on your own” endeavor. Some of the more well-heeled programs have fitness trackers to see whether student-athletes are reaching their strength and conditioning goals, but the vast majority of programs must count on their student-athletes to be adults and complete the work assigned to them.

When June 1 rolls around for the Navy football program, Fitzpatrick says, “it’s go time.”

“We’re back to training four or five times per week,” he says. “We’ve got speed work two times per week, conditioning two times per week, and lifting four to five times per week. Right

back to our routine. Our summer months look a lot like our winter months. But I can count on these kids. They’re super motivated. They have goals and they want to hit those goals.”

A Team Effort

Just like the Navy football program demands a team effort to win a given game, the members of the strength and conditioning staff view themselves as a team designed to build men of character and leadership. Head coach Ken Niumatalolo demands nothing less of his team and his staff, including his strength coaches.

“If we’re doing anything that’s not feeding that vision, then we’re wrong,” says Fitzpatrick. “We always want to constantly feed that. The athletes understand. They’re dialed in. They know what the deal is. Our role as a staff is that of servant-leader. We serve the athletes and teach them that it’s important they serve their brother in turn.”

Fitzpatrick’s staff includes the following strength coaches:

- Cliff Dooman has been at Navy for 19 years. He is also a tenured professor in the Physical Education Department.
- Bryan Miller is in his fifth year at Navy. Prior to Navy, he served as the head strength and conditioning coach for football at Oregon State.
- Nick Aloï has been with Navy for just over a year. Prior to Navy, Aloï served as assistant director of speed and conditioning at Coastal Carolina University from 2016–2019.

Front Rush Simplifies Recruiting Software Adoption

If changing recruiting software seems like a headache, but is something your program desperately needs, Front Rush can simplify the process and help you migrate to a system that is rightsized to meet your needs.

Over the years, the average football coach has worn many a hat. There's the tactician, the magician, the captain, the drill sergeant, the mentor and the father figure, to name a few. However, software purchaser hasn't always been at the top of the list.

These days, there are few roles more important to the future of a college football program. A coach who understands the power of data, the necessity of communications, and the influence of great content knows that the right recruiting software can mean the difference between just staying organized and building a great recruiting class and team.

Aaron Wallace is Head of Sales for Front Rush, a software developer that creates powerful, easy-to-use and intuitive solutions for coaches and athletic departments across the country. Front Rush is backed by its parent company Reigning Champs, the leading path-to-college solutions provider in the U.S., with more than 41,000 active college coaches in over 72,000 teams across 34 sports. With more than 5.8 million student-athletes in their network, Front Rush is positioned to command a central position in software solutions for many years to come.

Wallace says that while most coaches don't purchase enterprise-level recruiting software, they should embrace the opportunity to learn about the software purchasing cycle so they can identify best-of-breed software like Front Rush when they see it.

"The process for selecting your recruiting software is really very easy," says Wallace. "When you come to us, we ask you about any of the programs you are currently using and if you are experiencing any issues. We ask about your goals and where your pain points are, and about any problems you're trying to solve. Once we understand your staff's needs, we'll invite you to a custom online software demo in a webinar-like setting."

The point of the webinar is to show coaches basic functionality and highlights that might interest them. The tour includes how to send out communications and manage the database, and touches on other general features and benefits. "If you're a Division I school, we may show you different forms, evaluation tools and other elite level features," says Wallace. "These are very casual conversations during the webinar. We let the coaches drive and really focus on what's important to them. We try to address any needs coaches might have by showing them the actual software and how it works. When our solutions resonate with a coach and there's mutual interest, we move to discuss our flexible subscription packages, agreement and pricing."

Software Deployment

Usually, the most challenging part of changing from any legacy software system to a modern, innovative solution like Front Rush is implementation. Deploying the new software takes time and a

focus on both the details and the bigger picture. Fortunately for football coaches, Front Rush does all the heavy lifting.

"First things first, we're going to ask for your database and the names of any coaches on staff that are going to use the software," says Wallace. "We'll need to create usernames and passwords for them. Next, we ask for any data, reports and content they want added to the system. If they have a lot of cool graphics or photos they want to use for branded emails, we'll collect those to personalize their system. We'll ask for all of that because we want to build out the system the way coaches expect it to look before they get their hands on it. That way, it just feels natural when they're in it."

After that, Front Rush begins training for coaches. They make training as simple as possible, focusing on only what coaches need to know to make the system work as smoothly as possible.

"The biggest thing coaches need to focus on is the mobile app, because these days, coaches are basically living out of their phones," says Wallace. "Everyone needs to focus on the mobile app. The training is extremely simple. It's a 10-minute demonstration. We show them, this is how you access your recruits. This is how you filter your recruits, and this is how you make a phone call. And everything logs after the fact."

If it sounds incredibly simple, that's because it is.

"It's probably one of our most well-liked features," says Wallace. "Coaches expect it to be as low maintenance as possible. Overall, we try to base the whole platform on simplicity and ease-of-use, because we know coaches don't typically want to be their own IT staff. They are there to coach, not troubleshoot software."

Support When Coaches Need It

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Cliff Dooman



Bryan Miller

All Photos: Navy Football/
United States Naval Academy

Cliff Dooman (left) has been at Navy for 19 years. He is also a tenured professor in the Physical Education Department. Bryan Miller (right) is in his fifth year at Navy. Prior to Navy, he served as the head strength and conditioning coach for football at Oregon State.

- Bryant Harper joined Navy just over a year ago, as well. Prior to Navy, Harper served as assistant strength and conditioning coach at Southeastern Louisiana University and interned with the University of Florida Gators football team.

“My staff is really strong in keeping the guys motivated because they have that experience,” says Fitzpatrick. “They are the biggest part of keeping our guys motivated. I do my part, but my staff is there constantly aiding in that process.”

Keeping players from a variety of backgrounds with different personalities motivated can be a bit of a juggling act and requires constant communication among coaches.

“I may be able to motivate John, and Coach Miller may be able to motivate Joe,” says Fitzpatrick. “Coach Dooman and Coach Aloï know exactly what types of personalities they’re best at motivating. I think we have enough experience and a wide range of personalities on my staff that we can reach every kid. We do it by building relationships first.”

Relationships Built On Trust

When an athlete trusts his coach, then the athlete will go the extra mile and allow himself to be pushed even beyond the point he believes himself able to produce. That trust is something developed over time and requires the coach and athlete to experience adversity together and come out the other side.

“If you know your athletes and can reach your athletes, then you know the buttons to push to keep that motivation going,” says Fitzpatrick. “But that relationship must be authentic. Our program is built on a few things: love, toughness, discipline and selflessness. Learning the athletes, building those relationships, is part of the love.”

Fitzpatrick describes his staff and his strength program as an open book. He has three daughters. Coach Miller has a daughter and a son. Coach Dooman has two sons. Those

kids are around the program all the time. They know the student-athletes and the student-athletes know them. The players see their coaches interacting with their own kids and they know what that authenticity looks like.

“That’s another unique thing about this place,” says Fitzpatrick. “It’s a great place to raise your family. From the top down, Coach Niumatalolo was us to be good husbands and fathers. Our wives are allowed to come into this program and they do. My kids think this place is a playground.”

It allows Fitzpatrick and his staff to focus on reaching each and every player that walks through their doors. They’ll do whatever it takes. It’s one thing to say you want to reach every kid, but practically speaking — boots on the ground — it requires a level of communication and humility among coaches that is somewhat atypical.

“I’ll be the first one in the room to say, ‘I don’t know if I’m getting the most out of Jimmy. Do any of you guys have a good relationship with him?’” says Fitzpatrick. “Almost always, someone will speak up and say, ‘Oh yeah, I’ve worked with him several times and we’re tight,’ or ‘His best buddy works out in my group, so I’ll talk to him.’ If we team up that way and stay in communication with each other, there’s no one we can’t reach.”

Lessons Learned

Fitzpatrick isn’t exactly new to the Navy football program, himself. The 2020 season will mark his third as the head strength coach, but prior to that, he spent 2012-2018 as an assistant in the Navy Strength & Conditioning Department.

His experience with Navy, the University of West Virginia, the Minnesota Vikings and Penn State, helped him cultivate a foundation of knowledge and confidence to know that how he performed his job was the right way to do it. Still, there are always lessons one learns the day he sits down in the big chair.



Nick Aloï



Bryant Harper

Nick Aloï (left) has been with Navy for just over a year. Prior to Navy, Aloï served as assistant director of speed and conditioning at Coastal Carolina University from 2016–2019. Bryant Harper (right) joined Navy just over a year ago, as well. Prior to Navy, Harper served as assistant strength and conditioning coach at Southeastern Louisiana University and interned with the University of Florida Gators football team.

“Being the final decision was maybe the one thing that was new to me,” says Fitzpatrick. “It’s easy to say, ‘I would do this,’ or ‘I would do that,’ in a given situation, but when you’re the final decision and it’s your name on it, and all the responsibility falls on your shoulders, that’s a little different.”

A key to his decision-making process is that Fitzpatrick is not afraid to ask the advice of people in his life who may know better than he does, then incorporate those points of view into his outlook before he makes a final decision. It’s a highly intelligent method for decision-making.

Anyone can ask advice, but the reality is, most people are just looking for validation of their own pre-conceived notions. Only a flexible, educable mind can truly learn from others before calling the shot.

“Coach Niumatalolo wouldn’t have put me in this position if he didn’t think I could handle it,” says Fitzpatrick. “And again, I can lean back on my staff. You look at Coach Dooman. He’s been here for 19 years. If there’s something I don’t understand, I can go to him. Coach Miller was a head guy for eight or nine years. If I have a question about being a director, I can go to him.

Then, there’s another coach outside of the football staff named Kirk Woolfolk, who is director of strength and conditioning/operations at Navy. He works with Men’s


Lacrosse now, but has been with Navy athletics for over two decades.

“He’s been a head strength coach at Notre Dame and was head strength coach here too,” says Fitzpatrick. “I view him as a mentor, and I bounce ideas off him. I’m not afraid to pick up the phone and call my peers and other people I’ve worked for. These are guys that I speak to, and I lean on,

and I take advice from. They can speak on their situation, and I may be able to draw one or two things from that to help mold the situation here. I’m a sponge.”

It’s a fitting description – the sponge – especially among the ranks of Navy Midshipmen. Sponges have unspecialized cells that can transform into other types, making them extremely resistant

to changing environmental pressures. They accept what their environment provides, surviving by sifting premium nutrients from a constant flow of unknown matter. Their way of life serves as a testament to life; the fossil record contains well-preserved fossil sponges dating back 580 million years.

“I think I am always learning,” says Fitzpatrick. “Tomorrow’s going to be a different challenge. Again, I don’t think I have all the answers. I think I’m just, I don’t know, an open book. Ready to go. On my toes. Ready for the next challenge.” 

“Tomorrow’s going to be a different challenge. Again, I don’t think I have all the answers. I think I’m just, I don’t know, an open book. Ready to go. On my toes. Ready for the next challenge...”



Be Simple And Coach To Players' Strengths

Photo: D.M. Young Photography

Playing well as a team requires a certain flexibility in coaching style that allows younger, more inexperienced players to play to their strengths instead of being forced into a system they do not understand.

By Keith Page, Defensive Coordinator, Second Baptist (Texas) School

This upcoming season will be my 20th in coaching. I have been blessed to coach football for all of those years. Throughout my career, much like most other coaches, I have worked my way up from position coach to coordinator. I've coached and coordinated both sides of the ball. Probably what's different than most, if not all others, is that I have only coached at private schools.

In some circles, private school coaches are not respected and are considered "not a ball coach." In some cases, that is 100 percent true. However, there are some of us in the private school sector that are "real ball coaches" and do things at a professional level. I happen to be one of those.

We know the game, we study the game and we take the game seriously. For me, coaching is a calling. I have been extremely fortunate during my career to work with some legendary public school coaches. I have worked with some coaches who have moved on to be head coaches at high classification public schools. I have always loved coaching in private schools, especially Christian schools, and have made it one of my many goals to separate myself and be looked at as a legitimate "ball coach" in the private school ranks. If I get the opportunity to become a head coach, I plan to keep that goal.

During the early years of my coaching career I would attend clinics, listen to lectures, listen to coaches, talk with other coaches and hang on every word they had to say. Most

conversations were the same. They would talk about their schemes, the defenses they ran, the offenses they ran, what each position needed to look like, and it all had a certain similarity. This was how it used to be. You run your stuff and you make players fit that.

There are some differences that separate private schools from public schools in Texas. First, there are not always full-time, school employee coaches. You use stipend or adjunct coaches, and your staff can change regularly. Second, there are very few private schools that have athletic periods. Weights, film, installs and other related activities must be done before school, at lunch, before practice or after practice. Third, some private schools are only high school. They are not being fed by 7th and 8th grade programs that run the same schemes as the high school or have that have the same coaching staff philosophy, techniques and fundamentals. Some middle schools, or junior high's, that kids come from don't even have football. This means there are players who come in that have never played football until high school.

I would come back from listening to these folks and quickly realize that our situation was very different from theirs. There are plenty of good ideas and things that we would, and still do, pick up from different programs. But to try and do what others do is sometimes not feasible. What I have found is that our attitude and defensive standard, the way we do things, is most important.

Learning To Change

My second stint as a defensive coordinator was in 2017. I came to Second Baptist School in 2016 after being an offensive coordinator at my previous stop. That first year at Second Baptist, I was an offensive assistant coaching running backs. In 2017, our defensive coordinator left and our head coach asked me to move and coordinate the defense. Our defensive staff at the time had a lot of knowledge. I mean, our defensive line coach had been coaching longer than I had been alive. So, I wanted to make sure that I listened to their knowledge. At this point in my career, I figured out that I didn't have all the answers.

In our first staff meeting, we were discussing setting the front and flipping our defense. It was the only way I had done it. Our linebackers coach told me that the previous year, the defense really started playing well when they stopped flipping and just lined up. Fast forward to the season and our first game was defensively awful.

I was doing my morning devotion the following Monday and I asked God for help communicating with our players. He reminded me, as he usually does, of the conversation with our linebacker coach.

That's when the coaching experiment all started. How can we simplify everything that we do, and get the most out of our players?

Let's take the thinking out of it and demand their best. If they aren't producing and playing to our standard then let's reward the guys who are. Age, talent, status didn't matter. We went back to our base odd front defense and played quarters coverage back behind it. We started evaluating our players each week to determine what they did well and growing upon that. We taught our guys fundamentals and techniques, then molded the scheme around what we had. People would and still ask "what do you run" and our answer is "we are multiple, we are going to evaluate our players' strengths and build around those."

We based out of a 3-4 look that first year in 2017. We fired a lot of guys that thought they could play. We took a linebacker and played him at end. We allowed him to play in a standup position because he was more comfortable. We called up a freshman and sophomore corner from the junior varsity midway through the season because those guys were playing the Second Baptist standard of defense.

Our last district game to finish the regular season, those guys had developed quite a bit and we jumped into a 4-2-5

look. Our opponent was run heavy with a big physical running back. We walked up our outside backer to one side because he was great at setting the edge. We had two real good safeties and would keep a two-high look and let those guys fill from depth because they were downhill players.

Our first playoff game, we were facing a really talented quarterback. We decided to get into a 4-3 and take our best linebacker and let him spy in the middle. The result was a shutout win for our team.

In 2018, we started the first game in a 3-4. Our second game we played a team that was one-dimensional, running the ball. The same outside backer that did a great job setting the edge in 2017 was back, so we walked him up again and came out in our 4-3. Our defensive backs were really good

at playing coverage and staying over the top. We still had the two safeties that were downhill.


We tried playing some 2-read or palms, but we weren't really good at it. We weren't good at man coverage either. We kept seven in the box and let those guys roam around and make plays.

This past season, we played our 4-3 look because we had seven linemen that all brought something to the table.

We rotated those guys through. Instead of walking our backer up, we played true linemen. We primarily played our 2-read coverage, because our defensive backs this year could do it. Our 4-3 has been a great defense now for two years. We have simplified our calls and tailored the defense to what the players can do.

Our current defensive staff does a great job teaching style of play, fundamentals and technique. We preach our standard, which is play with maximum effort, pursue to the ball, play physical between the whistle, bend don't break, and find a way to get the football.

Below are some team stats from the past three seasons:

- 2017- Team record 7-4. Defensive stats: 17 points a game, 9.8 points a game in district. 21 turnovers and 2 defensive touchdowns.
- 2018- Team record 11-2. Defensive stats: 11 points a game, 9.8 points a game in district. 41 turnovers (31 interceptions) and 7 defensive touchdowns.
- 2019- Team record 12-1. Defensive stats: 9.4 points a game, 8.8 points a game in district. 36 turnovers (21 interceptions) and 8 defensive touchdowns. 

“We preach our standard, which is
play with maximum effort, pursue to
the ball, play physical between the
whistle, bend don't break, and find a
way to get the football...”



Developing Leaders In Your Program

Developing great leaders in your program and in your weight room is crucial to winning championships, but it's even more important to your student-athletes as they follow the paths down which life leads them.

By Dr. Pat Ivey, Assistant Vice President/Associate Athletics Director For Student-Health And Performance, University of Louisville

Leadership must be developed and cultivated by coaches and those who work closely with the team. Leaders are not born; leaders are trained and developed. There are certain personality traits some people are born with that may allow them to attract others more easily, but that is not leadership. There's also a difference between being a positive leader and a negative leader and I've had the opportunity to be around both.

As a coach or a team leader, you have to get those who are very influential from a negative perspective to switch to be a positive influence. If you are the person who is a negative leader, then you can change your attitude and actions. If you don't consider yourself a leader at all, change the way you think!

Everyone has the capacity to lead in some area. Some people are more action-oriented and some are more vocally talented. To be the best leader you can be, you need to know yourself and what your strengths are. Don't try to be someone you aren't because your teammates probably know if you are being authentic.

John C. Maxwell is one of my favorite authors who writes about leadership. One of my favorite books he wrote is *The Five Levels of Leadership*. Here are the five levels he writes about:

- **Level 1: Position** — Rights, people follow because they have to.
- **Level 2: Permission** — Relationships, people follow because they want to.
- **Level 3: Production** — Results, people follow because of what you've done for the team.

- **Level 4: People Development** — Reputation, people follow because of what you have done for them personally.

- **Level 5: Pinnacle** — Reputation, people follow because of who you are and what you represent.

As a strength and conditioning/athletic performance coach, I try to develop as many level 4 and 5 leaders as possible. I find that when you invest in developing people as leaders, the whole organization's or team's performance improves. Level 4 and 5 leaders develop other leaders on the team, and they carry on the team message.

For someone to be a level 4 or 5 leader, they must go through the previous four stages of leadership. As a coach or captain on the team, you must invest in people personally by getting to know who they are and helping them to be as competent as possible. It takes a lot of time and energy to develop leadership, but it's always worth it.

One of the best leaders I ever had a chance to coach was Chase Daniel. Chase has played in the NFL for over a decade. He was an outstanding quarterback at the University of Missouri, a finalist for the Heisman Trophy award, and an All-American. While he was a good leader by action, what always stood out to me was his vocal leadership.

Chase knew he had to guide others to reach their individual potential if they were to win championships. One time, Chase used his vocal leadership during a conditioning session. He asked for a quick pause to come speak with me just before we were about to finish the on-field training

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Photo: RoadTripSports.com/Chuck Cox

Leadership within any program comes from those willing to put themselves out there and lead by example.

session with a conditioning segment. He told me the participation at the previous night's player run practice was not up to championship standards. As a leader, he held the team accountable to the championship standards the team established. He put himself in the position to be disliked by some of his teammates in order to hold everyone accountable to their own dreams and principles.

Some athletes I coached would ask me what I expected from them as a leader and how did I expect them to lead? I would always answer those athletes by saying it wasn't my job to tell them how to use their gifts, talents and skills. Some athletes who were more introverted would sometimes feel uncomfortable being a vocal leader. They would tell me, "Coach, I'm not really the talkative type and I don't feel comfortable being a vocal leader, but you want us to be vocal leaders." My response would be, "to be a vocal leader doesn't mean you give great speeches in front of the team." If you just talk to the person or your teammate standing next to you and give them guidance, advice, encouragement, positive feedback, etc., you're a vocal leader.

Understanding Teamwork

Another of my favorite books by Maxwell is *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*. In the chapter, "The Law of the Big Picture," he writes: "If you think you are the entire picture, you will never see the big picture."

He believes the goal you have on a team is more important than the role. Everybody on a championship team doesn't get the publicity, but everyone can say he's a champion.

"The Law of the Chain" speaks to a chain being only as strong as its weakest link. Using a chain as a metaphor is great because all the links are connected and each serves a purpose. Within the team concept, the stronger links must

strengthen the weaker links. This is where the team leaders are needed, because they must first identify the weak links, then form a strategy to strengthen them.

"The Law of the Catalyst" speaks to the players or people on a team who make things happen. They make the plays in the crucial times when the plays need to be made for the team to continue or generate its momentum. Championship teams have catalysts who step up when the pressure is high and deliver their best performances using their skills and talents.

"The Law of the Bad Apple" is one of the most important chapters in my opinion. In my experience, bad apples are the fastest way to cause destruction and demise. To put it simply, a bad apple is a person with a bad attitude. Bad attitudes can destroy teams faster than good attitudes can put the team together. Still, bad apples can change their negative attitude and become a positive, productive teammate.

"The Law of the Price Tag" speaks to the idea of there being a cost for success. On championship teams, everyone must be willing to pay the price to be a champion. Ultimately, the law of the price tag is about sacrifice. Championship teams have leaders who are willing to sacrifice immediate gratification for the potential achievement of the big goal. Here are four rules for The Law of the Price Tag:

- The price must be paid by everyone.
- The price must be paid all the time.
- The price increases if the team wants to improve, change or keep winning.
- The price never decreases.

Getting Involved

As I look back on my college career as a student athlete, I wish I had been more involved with different social groups. I believe if I had more experience with how to conduct professional meetings, it would've helped me more, especially today as I'm a college athletics administrator. As a student-athlete, I don't remember being encouraged to participate in outside organizations or activities. Mostly, we were encouraged to spend most of our time thinking about our sport and doing whatever we needed to do to remain eligible to play our sport. Thankfully, that paradigm has evolved. Here are some other ideas and opportunities you may want to consider participating in to expand your growth as a leader.

Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC)

This association-wide committee was adopted at the 1989 NCAA convention; it was formed primarily to review and offer student-athlete input on NCAA activities, and propose legislation that affected student athlete welfare. There are usually two student-athletes from each sports team who are designated to serve on the SAAC. Officers are usually voted on by the group. This is a great way to be a part of a group that has a voice for the student-athletes.

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Leadership Council

Some coaches select a group of players on a team to be a part of the team’s leadership council. Sometimes coaches select athletes they see leadership abilities in, and sometimes they select players who they predict will be good leaders in the future.

Former University of Missouri head football coach Gary Pinkel would select a few players from each class for a total of 11-13 members. He taught leadership skills and used this group as a conduit for communication to and from the team. If there were any serious discipline issues, the leadership council was a strong determining factor for outcomes and decisions.

There are opportunities for more social interaction in the spiritual realm with groups such Athletes in Action (AIA) or Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). These and similar organizations can help coaches and players develop as leaders. Understanding who you are and your beliefs can guide you as a leader.

The Importance Of Self-Starters

As coaches, we always want a team full of self-starters. Teams that have a lot of self-starters — or people who know how to get themselves going without much help from others — are very motivated teams. Being a self-starter is a strong leadership quality.

When I went back to school to get my Doctorate in sports psychology, I learned about self-determination and intrinsic motivation theory proposed by Edward L. Deci and Richard Ryan. Their self-determination theory requires three components: competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

In my book, *The Table*, Southeastern University strength and conditioning coach Akeem Robinson wrote about the importance of autonomy in his chapter, “Personal Development.”

Competence means knowing what you’re supposed to be doing and how to do it. Do you understand the techniques and fundamentals required to play your position? Competence is about knowing your alignment and your assignment and being where you’re supposed to be at the correct time. It’s also about knowing where your teammates are and what their assignments are. Competence is also about knowing and understanding the game plan.

Autonomy is the ability to make decisions and choices by yourself and for yourself or your teammates. It is important on championship teams for leaders to make decisions and contribute to the team’s direction. Having coaches who foster an environment that encourages this sort of freedom is important. Championship teams have leaders who can make decisions and contribute to the mission. Having coaches who foster an environment that encourages this sort

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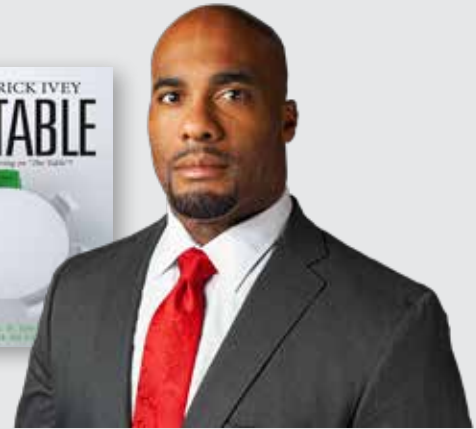
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of autonomous leadership is conducive to high performance which can lead to winning more games. There are many important decisions you face throughout the day and having the experience of making your own decisions and recognizing the consequences of those decisions directly translates to sport and life.

Relatedness is a term that describes how we as human beings are socially connected with each other. Being a part of the team is one of the strongest environments that provides many social interaction opportunities. Relationships with teammates and coaches can be very beneficial to accomplishing common goals. The next chapter will go more in depth discussing the value and power of relationships.

Ultimately, you must take responsibility for your own leadership development. Don't wait for someone else to put you in position to be a leader. You should be constantly doing the work necessary to be ready, always be working on developing your character and your leadership. 

This article was excerpted from his book The Table: What Are You Leaving On The Table. Coaches can order The Table in print or as an ebook at <https://bit.ly/IveyTable>. Learn more about Dr. Ivey at <https://pativey.com/>.

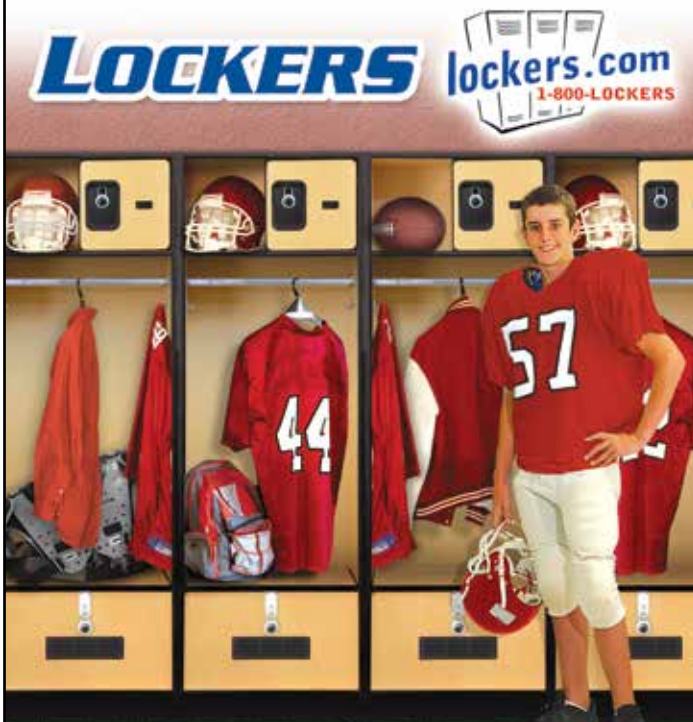


Dr. Pat Ivey is the assistant vice president/associate athletics director for student-athlete health and performance at the University of Louisville. He oversees the departments of Sports Medicine, Sports Performance, Sports Nutrition, Mental Health and Performance, and Sports Science. He is also an adjunct professor at the University of Missouri, teaching a course in Foundations of Sport Performance via an online master's program in Positive Coaching. He has served at the University of Missouri as the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Access and Leadership Development.




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Mental Toughness ... For Coaches

Photo: RoadTripSports.com/Chuck Cox

The vague concept of mental toughness becomes much more concrete for coaches who desire to model it. Coaches must remain aware they are constantly in the spotlight, consistently maintain their composure and always demonstrate the values they wish to confer upon their student-athletes.

*By Ben Gleason, PhD, CSCS*D, RSCC, USAW2, Louisiana Tech University, Ruston (La.) High School*

Mental toughness is a big catch phrase used by coaches, though we seldom dig deep into the meaning of the term. We often hear terms like “intestinal fortitude” and associate these terms with players who simply refuse to lose.

If pressed to provide a deeper explanation of the term, most of us are challenged to find the appropriate words. I think what most coaches describe as mental toughness is actually a muddy mix of behavioral things in the football context:

- Resilience after an unfavorable play or life event.
- Stoicism in the face of a great challenge.
- Staying focused despite great potential for distraction.
- Doing the right thing when one faces a critical decision.
- Coping with substantial challenges on the field of play and in life.
- And, a variety of other behaviors we see great players demonstrate.

In fact, sport psychology researchers have debated the term “mental toughness” for several decades. Quite an array of study is available to guide us in better understanding and defining the concept.

In their qualitative study of mental toughness in the *Journal of Applied Sports Psychology* (<http://bit.ly/AFCAspsyc>, 2002), Graham Jones, Sheldon Hanton, and Declan Connaughton observed that, “virtually any desirable positive psychological characteristic associated with sporting

success has been labelled as mental toughness at one time or another.”

The authors also discussed the agreement in prior sport psychology research regarding athletes’ coping strategies used to handle the stress and anxiety encountered because of the pressures of sport competition. In their qualitative study, they asked elite international-level athletes to discuss what they felt mental toughness was and to associate phrases with the concept. It is interesting that the highest-ranked phrase athletes felt the term embodied was, “having an unshakeable self-belief in your ability to achieve your competition goals.” The second-highest rated phrase was, “bouncing back from performance set-backs as a result of increased determination to succeed.”

It appears that the most successful athletes perceive self-belief and confidence to be powerful drivers of their performances, and there is likely a “right way” to react to adversity and retain composure in the face of great stress. Ultimately, we must realize that our behaviors are driven by our own decisions (or our will) and habits, as well as a genetic tendency to do what we do.

I believe the same factors apply to coaching as well. I have discussed the above idea with several coaches, including a few gentlemen who have worked with coaching legends such as Paul Bryant and Tom Landry. Many coaching legends demonstrated a certain type of mental toughness we should all strive to embody during our work. This is particularly important during adverse events that occur

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during games, where we must strive to model appropriate behavior – the type that we would expect from our own players. If we do not, we have no right to get upset at players if they act out of line under duress.

This concept is called behavior modeling, where we show our players how to act by doing things the right way ourselves. After all, during games coaches stand in full view of our players and fans.

We must consider that our own behavior is a critical influence on our players' development and it sets the tone for practice and competition.

Modelling Behavior

Coaches are role models and should retain some level of composure in stressful circumstances. Demonstrating volatile or undesirable behaviors on the sideline or in practice can certainly be a negative influence upon our players' development, modeling how a player must not act in response to an adverse event on the field or in life.

We see many unfortunate behaviors by players, coaches, and even parents these days—issues causing big problems in youth sports. On the extreme end, frequent examples may be found in the media of athletes and parents verbally and physically attacking game officials, and this has led to critical shortages of game officials in many youth sport leagues.

Of course, a less extreme and far more common example is when a coach loses his temper at a referee. One coach I met at a conference a few years ago shared a superb illustration of the reality of this behavior brought to his attention by his own wife.

On the drive home from a game in which he had become very upset about what he perceived was poor game officiating, his wife wisely observed that his behavior after a referee's perceived bad call:

1. never led to a bad call being overturned, and
2. caused him personal anguish for an extended period of time after the event had occurred.

She suggested that he should control his own behavior better in the heat of the moment to help him handle adverse situations on the sideline.

It was with great humility that he absorbed the point in this critical self-reflective moment, and he realized that he actually coached better when he retained his composure and didn't let things bother him so much. He had to control his focus and mentally move on to the next event in the game, just like his players did.

So, it appears there is a certain mindset we should maintain in order to effectively handle stressful situations in a game or practice.

Maintaining Focus And Awareness

Having the presence of mind to maintain composure and focus and make logical decisions based on the problems at hand are essential coaching skills.

Jason Cummins, a former combat helicopter pilot and now executive associate athletic director at the University of

Kentucky, eloquently summed up the process of effectively handling crisis situations as being able to:

- First, “stop the bleeding” during an unfortunate event.
- Next, swiftly decide on your best course of action.
- Last, communicate the solution to your fellow coaches and players so they can implement it together.


An essential part of initiating this process in a charismatic manner is being able to control your own emotions and not let them get in the way of communicating properly. Of course, this is exactly a process that we would expect a great athlete to follow.

Maintaining self-awareness is also a component of mental toughness. A common issue in coaching today is sideline discipline. If done poorly, sideline discipline can affect the outcome of a game due to an untimely penalty flag. We even devote coaches to maintain sideline discipline during games, but seldom purposely address the details of how the quality is developed.

In recent years, some coaches have made news for drifting out onto the field toward the hash marks during games. Some have even needed strength coaches to tow them back to the sideline — sometimes by the belt — in order to avoid penalties or unintentional injuries to a game official. The practice has led to several news stories that whirled around social media often poking fun at some strength coaches who would otherwise have worked in the shadows. It is a sad day when we need not just a “get-back coach”, but a “get back coach...coach!”

I have personally observed young developing coaches demonstrating poor sideline discipline, which is a point of great concern to me. If questioned about carelessly drifting onto the field of play to gain a better view during competition or hurl remarks in the direction of an official, a young coach may respond: “It's ok, the ref didn't throw the flag.”

Of course, that isn't necessarily the important point? The coach willingly engaged in a behavior that the players are forbidden. This creates a double standard for our athletes to see and is a bad influence. Poor sideline discipline suggests either poor self-awareness or apathy about following the rules of the game. Again, a bad influence upon our athletes. As such, a coach's sideline discipline should be considered a mark of his willingness or ability to maintain composure, and consequently a mark of mental toughness.

Because of our status as role models for them, as coaches we really never stop behavior modeling for our athletes, whether we like it or not. Perhaps our greatest opportunities for showing athletes how they should behave are literally right in front of them. Growing as a coach requires some self-reflection and behavior correction when we perceive a problem behavior that we display. I encourage you to consider your own behaviors and evaluate the messages you send your players with your demonstrated behavior. 

Everyday Defensive Back Drills To Teach Multiple Fundamentals

By Chadd Braine, Special Teams Coordinator And Cornerbacks Coach, Saint Anselm College, and Lee Griesmer, Outside Linebackers And Safeties Coach, Saint Anselm College

Defensive football is becoming more complicated, but it will always come down to the basics of tackling, block destruction and taking the football from the offense. Game week often comes with limited time to work on these skills so we try our best to maximize our individual practice time.

Our defensive backs must cover the following fundamental skills each day. These points of emphasis are all of equal importance to us.

Movement Patterns, Tackling, Block Destruction And Ball Disruption

There are certain skills we must constantly practice to be a complete defensive back. We have listed over 30 skills we need to master in our defensive back skill checklist, which you can download at <http://bit.ly/DBchecklist>. Based on our scheme and technique, our chart can change from the Spring to the Fall or Fall to the Spring. The drill sheet is important because you can actually track what you have been doing during the fundamental periods of your practice. If you dedicate time to work on these skills your players will improve over the course of a season.

It is impossible to work each of the 39 skills we listed, so we try our best to run drills encompassing at least three of the skills for every drill we do on the field. This means if we run three or four drills in a 15-20 minute period, we can work on 9-12 skills in our individual session. We broke down three examples of drills we run that cover at least three skills per drill.

Drill Example No. 1

For the first element of every practice — whether it's a pre-practice segment or our first individual period — we use some type of movement pattern drill. These drills will likely be a pedal weave, pedal flip, or pedal side run. One of our favorite drills — because of its versatility — is the W drill, incorporating both a pedal with a transition to a forward run. We can also add

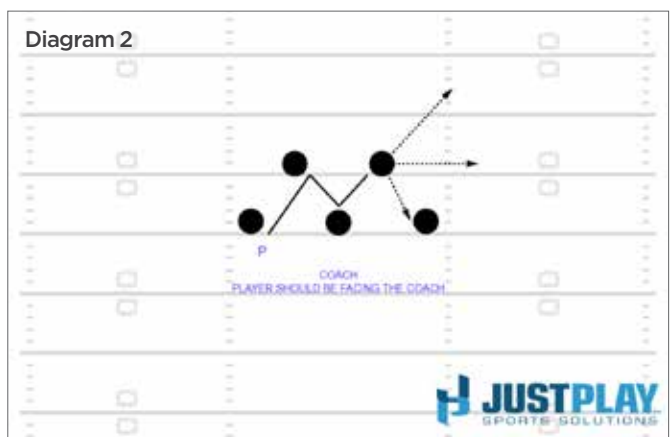
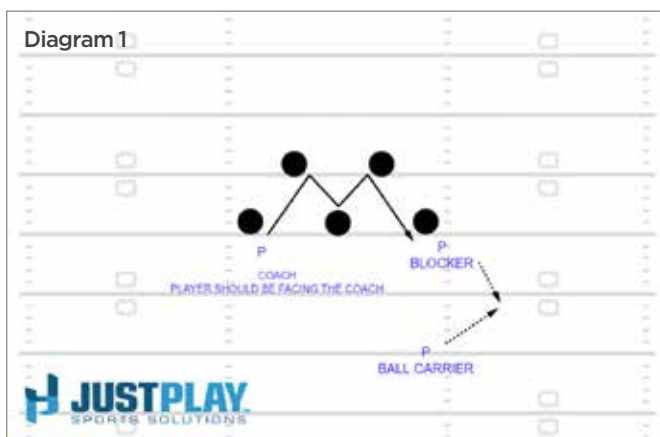
various finishes to this drill to work several fundamental skills at once. Within a 5-yard box, place five cones about 5-7 yards apart from one another (See Diagram 1). At the first cone, the corner or safety should get into a stance facing the coach ready to pedal and transition through the series of cones.

For our first finish, we like to add the fifth and final cone as a block destruction with a side tackle or sideline tackle. As the player approaches the final cone, he will begin to engage the blocker. As he does this, the ball carrier runs toward the sideline.

As the player comes down his stem to the blocker, he should move to maintain leverage as the ball carrier moves. As the player takes on the block, we emphasize that when he strikes he has a staggered stance with his inside leg up, so he is in a position of power to control the blocker. It is the job of the corner or safety to tear off of the block, and make a form side tackle or sideline tackle. This drill is used as an everyday drill, and works pedal, transitions, block destruction, and tackling in space. We will also incorporate a scoop and score instead of a sideline tackle to end this drill.

The W Drill also allows us to incorporate several different breaks at once, forcing the defensive back to keep his eyes on the coach as he works him through the cones (See Diagram 2). We have three primary breaks from fourth cone. He can break straight downhill, on a 90 degree turn or a vertical 45 degree turn. All of these are paired with high-pointing the ball.

On the 90-degree turn, it's very important for the defensive back to stop his pedal with his inside foot and then use his outside foot to gain ground on the 90-degree angle while simultaneously opening his hip, "stepping out, not under." On the 45-degree turn, it is important for the player to stop his initial pedal with his inside foot, and open his hip with his outside foot and elbow. This allows him to transition into a crossover run on the 45-degree angle.



Example Drill No. 2

One of our favorite drills is our Dogfight drill. This is an old-school drill that works on a smooth backpedal, a sharp break and pass break-up progressions. We segment our pass break-up progressions in the following manner.

- **Intercept The Ball** – The defensive back makes the break and makes the play. They must make the interception if they go for it.
- **Break Up The Pass** – The defensive back may not be in position to intercept the ball, but he must make sure the ball is not caught by the wide receiver.
- **Make The Tackle** – The defensive back is not in position to break up the pass, but he must make the tackle.

Our defensive backs understand if they are beat, they must focus their eyes on a late break-up by playing the hands. If they get a great jump and can get in front of the wide receiver, they'll try to make the interception.

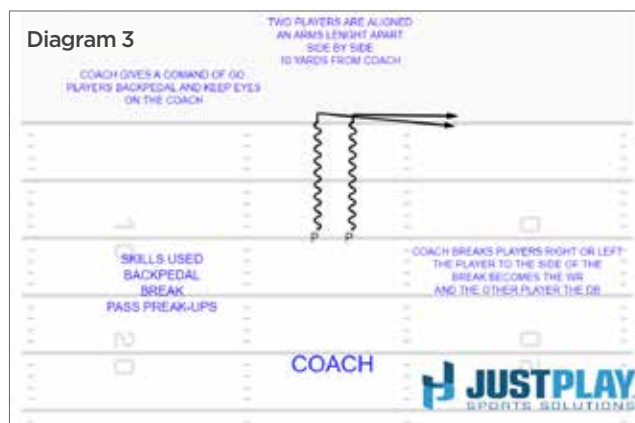
When we practice this drill, we start them on the +10 yard line and the coach will break them on the goal line, simulating deep red zone. To succeed at the drill, great eye discipline is important once the break is made. As you can see with Diagram 3, neither player knows prior to the snap who the defensive back or wide receiver is. The player to the side where the coach breaks them becomes the wide receiver and has a 1 yard advantage over the defensive back. This forces the defensive back to recover and go through the pass break-up progression.

We film this drill and teach from it during meetings. It is a great drill to get authentic reps on skills the defensive backs need.

Example Drill No. 3

Half-line, three-on-two or four-on-three drills helps us focus on the coverage concepts and route combos we'll see on Saturdays. The examples in Diagram 4 and Diagram 5 are route concepts we use to teach a variety of movements, including block destruction, tackling and ball disruption. In Diagram 4, the Safety is inverted like in our C-3 coverage.

The corner is playing his one-third in the coverage. Once he realizes the ball is thrown to the bubble, he reacts to the wide receiver blocking him. The defensive back needs to keep his outside leverage so the safety can attack hard, inside-out.



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It is very important for the safety to have confidence the cornerback will set the edge so he can take his shot.

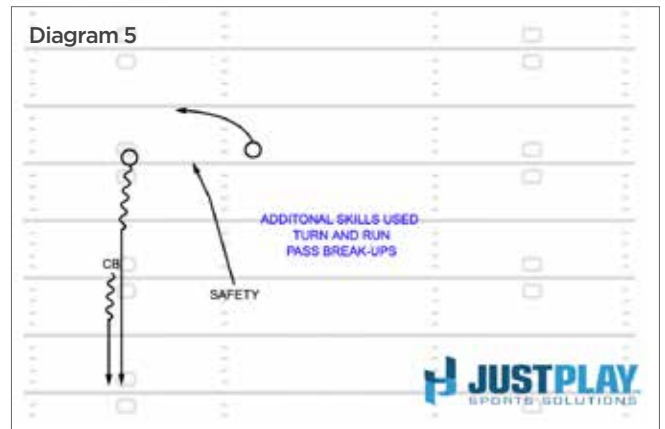
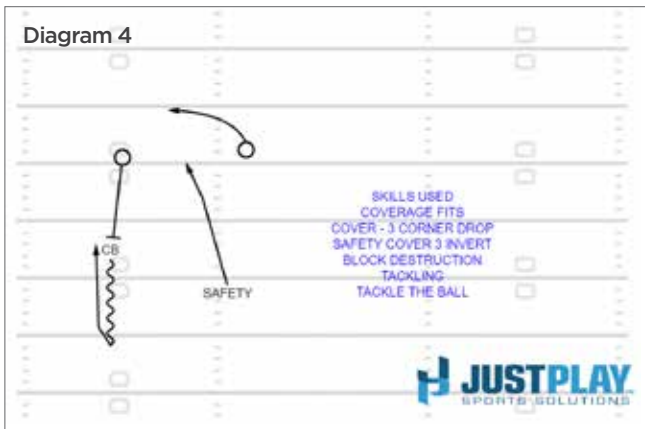
An aggressive inside-out path and striking the wide receiver with force can cause a fumble. In practice, the bubble wide receiver will be running with a hand shield to protect him so the free safety can make a proper tackle with inside leverage. Pursuit is important for the cornerback in case there is a missed tackle by the safety or if there is an opportunity to tackle the ball. The corner will shock and rip off the blocker and get to the ball.

We always encourage live speed but to stay off the ground. Giving a realistic look at the two wide receiver positions is critical to improvement. We want the drill to be competitive and safe. Our invert safety has to have great eyes on No. 2 as he inverts, working from No. 2 to No. 1. Ensuring strong eye

discipline with both our corner and safety allows us to work various route combinations.

In order to keep the cornerback honest, we give a second look occasionally with a stalk-and-go. The bubble and stalk-and-go by No 1 is a great example of being disciplined in a Cover 3 concept. It teaches eye discipline and, if they do make a mistake and come up on the bubble, they can work on their recovery skills to catch up to the wide receiver.

With so little time and so many skills to work on, we must be creative. For instance, anytime the ball is on the ground, even if it is a dropped pass in pass skeleton, we practice scooping and scoring. We have a mini-circuit during special teams working on ball disruptions, tackling and block destruction skills. Nobody stands around. **AFCA**



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X's & O's: Drills For Tight Ends, H-Backs And Quarterbacks

By Clint Trickett, Offensive Coordinator And Quarterbacks Coach, Florida Atlantic University

The Insert Drill was created to reenact “ISO/Lead” insertion plays. It can be used for counter plays or anytime you have read to insert up on a second- or third-level defender. The equipment needed for the drill is a pop-up dummy, two chutes and one hand shield.

Not only do we run a lot of insert plays, but we do a lot of different variations from them as well. We run this drill often because of the increasing amount of inserts in our offense. We do not believe in wasting time in individual with drills that aren't going to translate to the field. It is important to drill what you do as an offense for your position group to create muscle memory, so when a “coaching” situation comes up in a game, muscle memory takes over.

The best way to do that is in individual, before the bullets start flying in team periods. We will usually walk through the drill first, then jog, then full speed, looking for little details in each rep.

The first point of emphasis is to make sure the tight end does not false step and that he steps with the play-side foot. We also call it a read step. The read step helps set up the player so he is looking at the initial aiming/entry point. You then get your hat read from the play-side lineman.

We tell our guys to read it just like they are running the ball. If the lineman's head is inside, then get inside. If his head is outside then get outside.

The point of the drill is to come through the chutes with good pad level, eyes up and good tempo. The footwork/terminology we use for the players is long stride, short stride, strike, and then drive your near leg/near shoulder to the inside number of the defender.

The player inserting must shoot his hands to the chest, driving his feet, keeping them active, to dig them out for 5 yards to finish the drill. If the player has any pop to him, there will be a disconnect and there needs to be a hand reset, keeping his hands and elbows tight to the defender's chest. The player must always keep eyes and chest up.

The block you are simulating in the game is called ISO for a reason; it's a one-on-one block. Both of you get momentum going forward; the difference is as the offensive player, you know you're inserting on him before he does and you're not trying to make a tackle/spill the play. Your sole purpose is to take care of that defender.

Getting your players mentally ready for the block is key. This can be a dangerous collision, so getting them to understand the fundamentals of correctly inserting are crucial. That way, when they insert with a full head of steam, you're confident the muscle memory will take over.

Quarterback Drill: Math

Math is a drill for the quarterback that we've seen and there are many different variations.

First, you need to set up three, four or five different targets. (See Diagrams 1-4)

The targets can simulate any passing concepts/progressions you want to drill (i.e. Triangle read/True progression/3 level flood/1 high vs. 2 high, and so forth). Obviously, people work better as targets; that way, you know if you throw an accurate/catchable ball. But all targets will work, including nets, trash cans and dummies.

Diagram 1

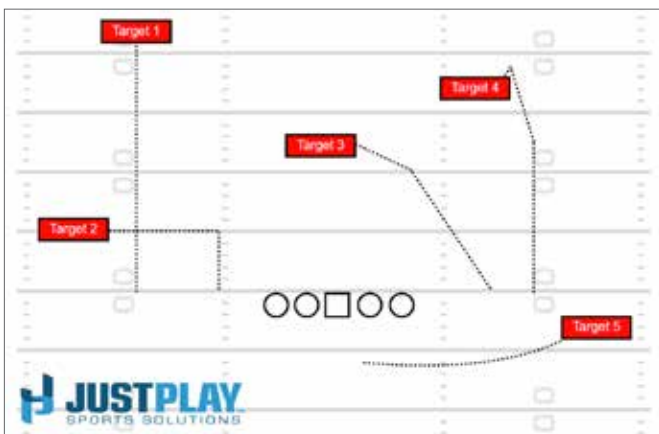
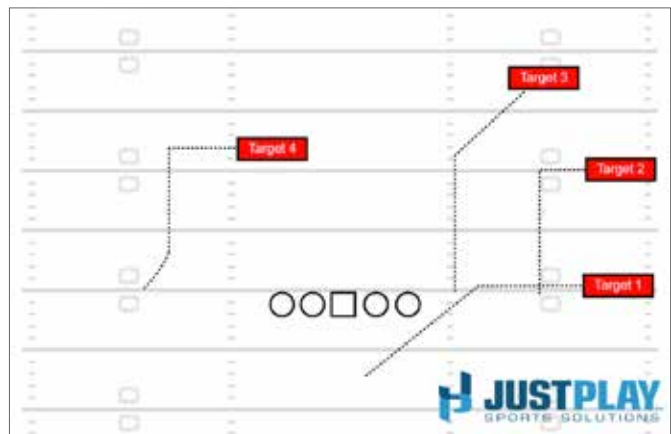


Diagram 2



In the drill, the quarterback does his drop while processing an “equation” given to him after the ball is snapped. We like to start the drill under center with a five-step drop. Dropping from under center is harder than gun and you get those extra two steps under center as opposed to gun.

First, the quarterback gets the snap from the coach, seeds the ball, takes his initial 6 o'clock drop step, and at that point, he should hear an “equation” for him to figure out and deliver an accurate ball to the “answer.”

For example, if the quarterback gets the snap and immediately gets “3-2,” he is processing $3-2=1$ as he is dropping, so when his back throwing foot hits, he should be able to throw the ball to the first target while using the proper footwork.

Pro style systems may implement that on your first read to throw when the back foot hits, reset to the second target, hitch into third and two hitches when going to the fourth target.

Some air-raid systems may just want you to do a “turret” drop where there are no set steps, but the quarterback must make sure he’s in a ready-to-throw position at all times.

Basic pocket presence can be implemented into the drill. My most common drop progression looks like this. If you

are working under center, throw to target No. 1 when the fifth step hits. Target No. 2 would be a hitch and throw. Target No. 3 can be the double hitch, and target No. 4 is a scramble and escape.

We sometimes like to have someone rush the quarterback to get him to move slightly and then deliver an accurate ball.

When starting off, keep the equations simple. The more you rep this drill, the harder the equations should be. Also, keep the aptitude of your players in mind. You want to challenge them but never humiliate them. Equations should look like the following: $2+2$, $3x1$, $4/2$, or $-4 +5$.

If you are a coverage-based system (1-high side v.s 2-high side) you can call out the coverage while the quarterback is dropping and have him work the correct side.

At the grad school level, give the quarterback an equation (i.e., $1+3$), but instead of him throwing to target No. 4, that would instead represent the coverage the quarterback must work the Cover 4 answer.

Don't be afraid to change it up to keep the players engaged and challenged.

This drill is a great way to get your quarterbacks some reps taking the correct drops while processing the information given to them and still delivering catchable and accurate passes. **AFC**

Diagram 3

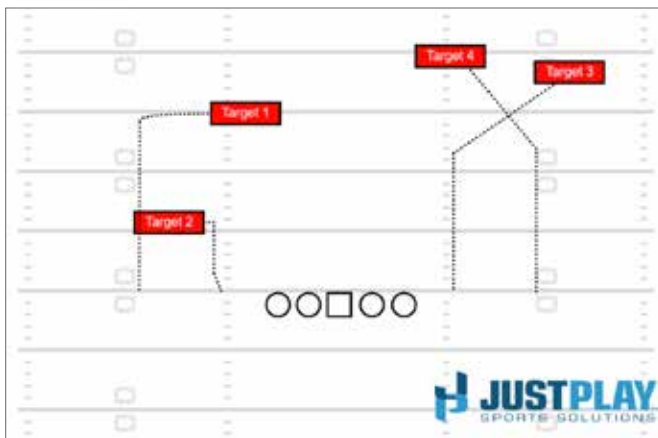
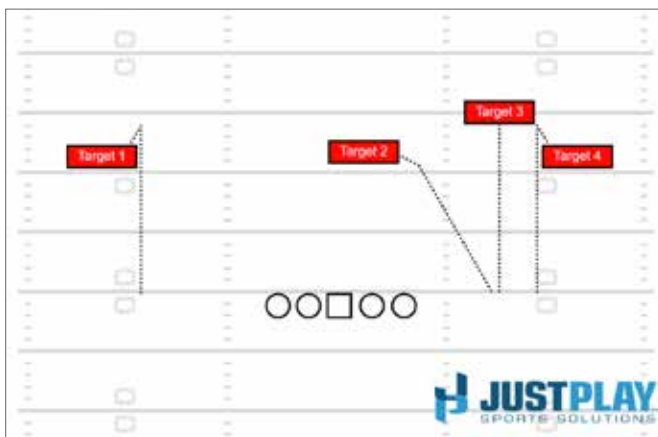


Diagram 4



Effective Punt Block Techniques

By John Harbaugh, Head Coach, Baltimore Ravens

We rush the punter from six-, seven-, or eight-box looks. Players may be trying to hold up, rush, force the punt, or pick for a teammate, but their mentality on the first two steps is the same: "I am going to block this punt." Players must never be caught flatfooted on the snap of the ball.

The first two steps are quick and aggressive. If they make a mistake in protection, they need to be in position to make the block. Most punt blocks in the NFL are the result of a missed assignment by the punt team.

Getoffs need to be quick. Players force the punt team to block them on every punt, which in turn helps the punt return unit hold up the punting team for big returns.

Players must have confidence in their ability to make successful blocks. Technique and knowledge of the punter's

block point and getoff time are critical. Everyone must develop a mental clock of when to attempt the block and when to shift to an aggressive holdup. All of this occurs by the third step.

These are the principles that apply to punt blocks:

- Know your assignment.
- Know the punter's block spot.
- Know the punter's getoff time (mental clock).
- Know when fewer than 5 yards is needed for a first down; be ready for a hard count.
- Execute a great getoff. Key the back tip of the ball and the center. Do not be called for offsides.
- If you get blocked, then block your blocker. Don't let your blocker block two.

Diagram 1

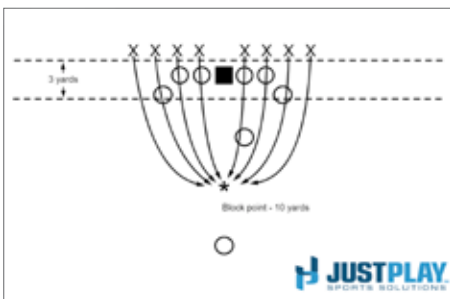


Diagram 2

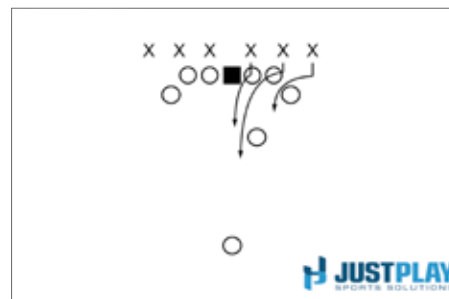


Diagram 3

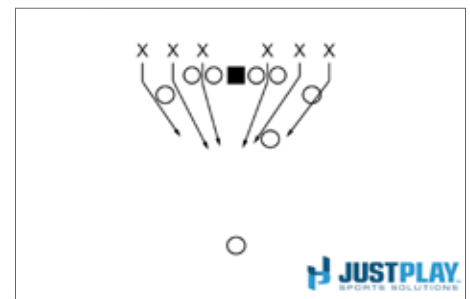


Diagram 4

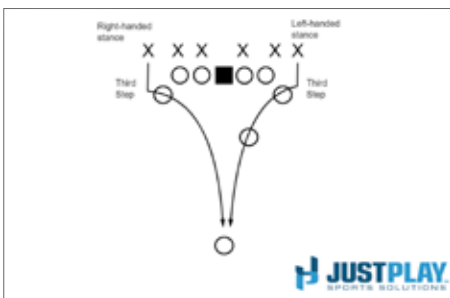


Diagram 5

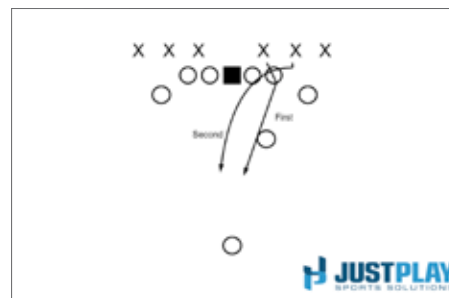
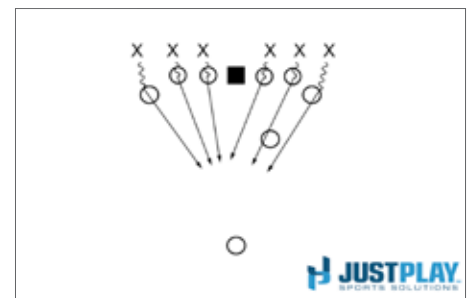


Diagram 6



- When the punt is blocked, the first man scoops the ball and scores.
- The second man blocks the punter or the first player in a wrong-colored jersey.

Certain coaching points that apply to punt blocking should be taught and reinforced consistently:

- Crowd the ball (alert neutral zone). Ends check alignment.
- Keep weight on your front foot.
- Use the best start stance that you have.
- Key the back tip of the ball and the center’s elbows and hips.
- Keep your pads down.
- Inside rushers don’t jump to make block.
- Accelerate across the block spot.
- Extend your hands, arms, and body by your sixth step.
- Flatten over the block spot, extending your torso out and flat.
- Push off the last inside step to extend.
- Keep your lower arm straight; allow movement in your upper arm.
- The upper arm adjusts to the punter’s foot.
- See the ball come off the punter’s foot. Keep your eyes open, as if hitting a softball.
- Get a hand out in the block spot.
- See the ball hit your hand.
- Take the ball off the punter’s foot.
- Block the ball like a volleyball block.
- Avoid contact with the punter (discipline).

Following are the specific techniques we teach.

Speed

After a great getoff, rush straight at the man in front of you. Beat the blocker outside and over the top. Swipe with your hands. Keep your pads down. Bend to the block point and block the punt.

Speed Rip Inside

Execute a great getoff. Take the first step straight ahead with the outside foot—sell the speed rush. Take the second step lateral inside the blocker. Club and rip inside the blocker. Keep your pads low. Block the punt.

Speed To Power

After a great getoff, rush straight ahead at the man in front of you. Get your hands inside the blocker’s chest and accelerate your feet to the block point. Run the blocker into the block point.

Up And Under

After a great getoff, rush hard up-field for two or three steps. Sell the outside speed rush. When your outside foot hits the ground (second or third step), hop inside of the blocker. Use your inside hand to club across the blocker. Accelerate to the block point and block the punt. Adjust the starting stance to get the proper steps.

Ricochet

Execute a great getoff. The first man to go on a twist stunt uses the ricochet technique. Penetrate the gap, keep the pads


low, and get to the blocker’s hip (pick). When the blocker comes off, accelerate to the block point and block the punt.

Flash And Go

Usually the flash and go is done out of a six- or seven-box holdup look. Use a great getoff. Step hard to the blocker and throw your hands at him as if it were a holdup. When he tries to release, accelerate by him with a rip move and block the punt.

Coaching the punt return team is challenging but fun. A punt return presents an opportunity to create a big play and gain valuable field position. The punt return is a defensive play that transitions into an offensive play when the ball is punted, so it entails diverse techniques.

Developing these techniques is part of what makes coaching enjoyable. In the end, however, coaching the punt return is about getting players to play with tenacity. Superior effort combined with solid self-discipline creates success.

Coach your guys to be great! 

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Move The Chains

By Mike Podoll, Associate Publisher

When Your Off-Season Strength And Conditioning Game Plan Is Thrown Out The Window

There are perhaps no group of human beings on the planet who plan as meticulously as football coaches. Nearly every aspect of a football coach's 365-day role depends on how well they plan.

During the second week of March 2020, however, an event occurred that no football coach in 100 years has had to plan for: The nationwide cancellation of the spring school semester due to a global pandemic of a novel Coronavirus.

For high school football programs, the ramifications were immediate and obvious. In addition to the cancellation of spring sports, gone were annual events like spring football, the allotted number of Spring "contact practices" (which vary by state), football camps, 7-on-7 leagues and a host of key fundraising events.

The biggest concern, however, quickly hit home for high school head football coaches: If my players are quarantined at home, how are they going to maintain their off-season strength and conditioning program?

"Our first order of business was to make sure we could reach our players," says Keith Riggs, head football coach at Jenks (Okla.) High School. "We had pretty good contact information on file, but we wanted to make sure that we could get ahold of every, single player in our football program.

"Our coaching staff started reaching out to players by position groups, making sure the various contact information we had on file was correct. From there it was a matter of deciding HOW to best communicate with them.

"It was critical to explain to our players what this situation means for us as a football program, including the new game plan for their at-home strength and conditioning work."

Many coaches were encouraged by the mood and collective vibe they felt from their student-athletes during the early weeks of the quarantine.

"I was so impressed with our players. They wanted to get back," says T.J. Miller, head football coach at Boyerton Area Senior (Pa.) High School. "They missed school, they missed football and they missed each other. They're tired of being at home.

"We started to see some great leadership rise to the surface, too. In late March, our players decided to organize a team pushup competition that ran all day on a Saturday. They were high energy, having fun and breaking team records.

"It ran from 8:00 AM to 11:00 PM and our players were sending the results and totals in real time to everybody through our shared Google Classroom system. We had a bunch of players who did over a thousand pushups that day.

"As football coaches, we were so proud. We had nothing to do with it. What our players are doing, as much as we can organize them, is they're leading themselves through this

situation. They are adapting — that's what young people do."

The suddenness of the situation caught everyone — players and coaches alike — off guard. Dealing with this new reality has forced football coaches to become creative. This creativity, however, has yielded unexpected rewards.

"We posted our official at-home workout system on our football team's Facebook page," says Mike Kirschner, head football coach and strength coach at Mount Vernon (Ind.) High School. "We had two versions of the program, one if you have weights and dumbbells in your home, and another workout to perform if you don't have weights.

"This system included a split workout routine with lower body work done on Mondays and Thursdays, while upper body lifts are set up for Tuesdays and Fridays. At-home plyometric speed work is scheduled for Wednesdays.


"I've got an assistant coach who coordinates Zoom video conference group workouts every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Participants log into Zoom and they go at it for 40 minutes. He's currently getting anywhere from 20 to 40 players on these video sessions at a time. I mean, we've even got parents doing it, too!

"We've made a concerted effort to communicate and get a lot of information out to players. And we're getting a great response. Yesterday's workout, for example, had 80 percent of my upperclassmen participate. My current underclassmen have all reported back with pictures or videos of their workouts."

"It's time-consuming, but it allows me to gauge what they're doing, how they're doing it and allows me to provide technical feedback with corrections whenever I see a workout video. The interaction keeps us connected. It demonstrates to our players that we're still a part of their lives and shows that we haven't stopped caring about them."

No one knows how this thing will play out. All remain hopeful for a quick return to normalcy. Having no tangible plan in place, however, is a completely foreign concept to football coaches.

"I don't consider myself a control freak, but as football coaches, we control a lot of things, right?" says Riggs. "We control our practice schedules, our lifting schedules, our meeting schedules, our game plans. We don't have a lot of control right now, though.

"It's important for football coaches to practice what we preach. We constantly tell players to stay focused and worry about things they have control over. As coaches, we have to remember to do the same thing right now." 

Mike Podoll is the Associate Publisher of AFCA Magazine. Email: mpodoll@threecyclemedia.com. Follow on Twitter: [@fcDaily_Podoll](https://twitter.com/fcDaily_Podoll)

AFCA & AMWAY

GREAT TEAM



Image by "GET Creative"

Coaches and business owners both build winning teams, both inspire, both motivate, both bring out the potential with those on their team. Both are a driving force for positive change and helping people achieve their goals. Amway recognizes this and is proud to partner with the American Football Coaches Association (AFCA), which is nationally known for its excellence in coaching, training and leadership.

Amway is a global, direct-selling consumer products company that has been empowering people to own their own businesses for more than 60 years. Now in the sixth consecutive year as the exclusive sponsor of the Amway Coaches Poll and presenting sponsor of the AFCA Coaches' Trophy.

Amway is proud to drive success both on the field and in business. The teachings of AFCA coaches transcend coaching boundaries — tackling tough issues like perseverance, recruitment, leadership, discipline, teamwork and goal setting. And since the beginning of their partnership in 2014, the AFCA and Amway have arranged more than 100+ coach speaking appearances where coaches have inspired business leaders on these such topics.

To learn more about Amway's partnership with the AFCA or on becoming an Independent Business Owner, visit www.amway.com/coachespoll.





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