

GridIronChat Episode 02 - Basic Football: Defense

Before the Snap

In this episode we discussed the basics of Defensive football. The defenders have far fewer rules to follow than the offense. They can line up wherever they please, as long as it is on the field of play and on their side of the football. But successful defense requires:

1) *Alignment*: Each player must line up (stand in a certain spot!) exactly where he is supposed to be. The design of the defense requires the player to be there, so he has the best chance to do his job – or *assignment*.

2) *Assignment*: The defense cannot defeat the offense if 11 guys are doing their own thing – unless they are just far physically superior. Everyone has a job – a *gap responsibility* versus running plays or a *coverage responsibility* versus passing plays.

The Positions

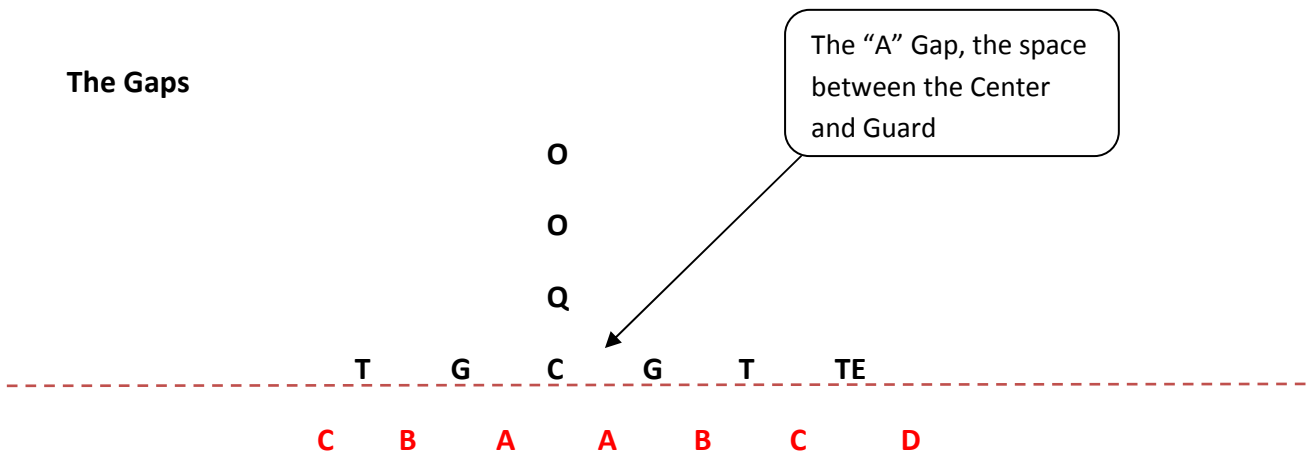
This is all covered in the E-Book, so I will keep coverage of positions brief here.

Defensive Linemen: Versus the run, they are gap defenders and run stoppers. This is their primary job. They line up on the line of scrimmage, and across from a particular offensive lineman, depending on their assignment. Versus pass, the Defensive Linemen are usually responsible for pass rush. In more complex, modern defenses they may have pass coverage.

Linebackers: The name tells you the alignment, they're about 3-5 yards in back of the line. They have to be versatile players, crushing run stoppers able to defend a gap. They also need to be able to go into pass coverage, either in man or zone coverage.

Secondary: Corners and Safeties. They are primarily pass defenders. Again, in modern defenses, Safeties or even Corners can sometimes be on a pass rush, or a key part of the run defense as well.

The Gaps



The gaps are lettered for the Defense. "A" Gap is between Center and Guard. We distinguish whether it is the right side or left side "A" Gap with a *strength call*. Defenses determine strength in different ways, but the easiest is to identify where the Tight End is, and call him the strength. If there are 2 Tight Ends, or no Tight Ends, it gets tougher. In this case, the arrow is pointing to the "Strong A-Gap."

In a *gap control* defense, each defender is responsible for a gap. Most defenses are designed in this manner.

The Play

In a normal play, the offense knows when the ball is being snapped, and where they are trying to go with it. The defense relies on *reads and keys* to determine where the ball is going. These are too numerous and varied for the scope of this podcast and article. But the defenders get the indication of where the play is going, and they take control of their gaps, expecting the ball carrier to come to them.

What about a pass play?

On a pass play, the defenders would get a pass read. If they were responsible for pass rush (linemen), they would attack the Quarterback. If they are responsible for pass coverage, they execute their pass coverage responsibility.

Man Coverage: Most basic form of coverage. You've got your man, I've got mine. One on one. We'll know who messed up if someone catches the ball!!

Zone Coverage: Each pass defender is responsible for a *zone*, or area of the field. There are numerous ways to divide up the field.