

# HEADSETS



WRITTEN FOR COACHES BY COACHES

VOLUME 4: ISSUE 3

## *Training* TIGHT ENDS

**PROTECT  
YOUR  
SCREEN GAME**

**THE FOURTH DOWN  
CUNUNDRUM**

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We are so glad to run Headsets season three! It has been unbelievable to have so many coaches willing to contribute their time and efforts to the coaching community. A special thank you to the writers this season as we have a great line up in store covering all things football.

As you go through the articles, there are many live links to recommended materials, articles and videos.

If you would like to contribute to Headsets, email Coach Simpson: [FBcoachsimpson@gmail.com](mailto:FBcoachsimpson@gmail.com) and let him know.

Also, please help us spread the word via social media and email about our Magazine as it is our hope to help as many coaches as possible.

Thank you,

\*CLICK ON ANY TITLE TO GO STRAIGHT TO ARTICLE\*



# DRILLS

## PROTECT YOUR SCREEN GAME



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It's common for offensive coordinators and quarterback coaches to call RB screen passes, and if the screen isn't there, just to dirt it and live to play another down.

Instead of wasting a play, what if there was a way to protect your screen game so you could throw a screen for positive yards every time?

This is exactly what Coach Eian Bain explained to me in our latest YouTube video.

Coach always tags the backside of his screen with quick game. That way, if the defense decides to blitz the opposite of the screen, there is an answer for a quick blitz-replace throw.

Below is an example of how coach draws up his screen game.

If you notice on the diagram, you can pair stick as a 3x1 concept, then throw it to the screen to the right.

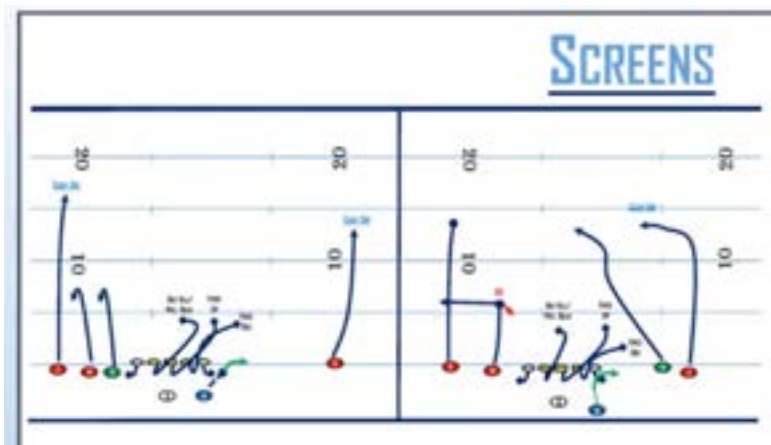
In the picture, coach has an option route coupled with a go route and a deep crosser. If the quarterback feels the need to get rid of the ball ASAP he can throw the option route.

In both instances, the quarterback is responsible for reading the post-snap pressure to determine where the ball should go.

Other than that, the screen should have the appropriate resources to pick up a good chunk of yards.

If you want to learn more about this screen concept and how to game plan vs blitzes, [check out our video here](#) (or just search Coaching Football With viQtory).

As always if you have any questions or would like to see more film on this technique, [feel free to reach out contact@viqtorysports.com](#)



# OFFENSIVE TALK

## THE 4TH DOWN CONUNDRUM



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When should we go for it on fourth down and why? Deciding whether to go for it on fourth down is one of the most debated choices among football coaches. When a team finds itself in a situation where it has not gained the necessary yardage to achieve a first down, the decision to go for it can be a game-changing moment. This article delves into the art, or is it science, of decision-making when it comes to fourth-down, examining the factors, risks, and rewards that influence this bold strategy.

### The Decision-Making Process

The decision to go for it on fourth down is multifaceted and involves analyzing various factors:

**Field Position:** Field position plays a significant role in the decision. Obviously, teams are more likely to go for it on 4th down when they are near the opponent's goal line, where a successful conversion might result in a touchdown or an unsuccessful conversion results in poor field position for the opponent. In contrast, being deep in one's own territory may lead to a punt to avoid conceding field position.

**Score and Game Situation:** The current score and game situation also impact the decision.

When a team is trailing late in a game or a high-scoring shootout, they are more likely to take calculated risks by going for it on 4th down to keep drives alive and keep the ball away from the other team.

**Offensive and Defensive Strengths:** A team's assessment of its offensive and defensive capabilities plays a crucial role. A potent offense may be more willing to go for it on 4th down, confident in their ability to convert. Conversely, a strong defense may influence a team to punt, relying on their defense to make a stop.

**Distance to First Down:** The distance required to achieve a first down is a critical factor. Teams are more inclined to attempt fourth-down conversions when they need only a short distance to move the chains, as opposed to a more challenging long-yardage situation.

### The Risks and Rewards

It almost goes without saying that going for it on 4th down is a high-risk, high-reward strategy:

**Potential Rewards:** Successfully converting on 4th down can provide a significant momentum boost, extend drives, and ultimately lead to points on the scoreboard. Teams that are successful in these situations are often praised for their courage and strategic acumen.

**Potential Risks:** Failing to convert on 4th down results in a turnover on downs, providing the opposing team with favorable field position. This can shift the game's momentum and lead to points for the opponent.

### The Analytics Revolution

In recent years we have seen a growing use of

*continued on next page*

analytics. Teams are increasingly using statistical models to inform their choices on fourth-down attempts. These models consider factors like field position, game situation, and offensive and defensive strength to provide data-driven guidance. The goal is to maximize expected points and win probability by making the right decision on the 4th down.

In 2022, Texas Tech led FBS in 4th down attempts; the Red Raiders from Lubbock attempted 52 fourth downs last season, and they were successful over 30 times. A fourth-down hot streak was the difference in Tech's 37-34 overtime win over Texas last season. The Red Raiders were 6-of-8 on fourth down versus the Horns. Through nine games this season, the Raiders had gone for it 30 times on 4th down attempts. They had converted 20 of those tries. Tech, along with several other teams, is known for having a guy with the analytics book near the play caller and they are known for playing by the book - "their" book.

It is very important to know that you are going for it on the 4th down before the 4th down arrives. What do I mean? If it is 3rd and 8 at midfield, knowing that you will go for it on 4th down (if it is 4th and manageable) will affect your 3rd down play call. You can now call a 2nd down and 8 play, instead of a 3rd and 8 play. An obvious advantage is that the defense will probably be in a 3rd and 8 defense and a good 2nd and 8 call has a better chance at success versus a third down defense. A four or five-yard gain on 3rd and 8 leaves the offense with a more manageable 4th down and 3 or 4 yards to go.

The play caller and QB must know that you are going for it on 4th down before you get to 4th down. The QB must know he cannot take a sack and does not need to throw a long 3rd down interception or force a pass that might get picked off. I often tell our Offensive Coordinator after 2nd down at midfield that he has two downs. He needs to know this so he can call his 3rd down play accordingly. If it is 3rd and 6, he knows he has two downs, and will probably call our best running play that can get us 3 to 4 yards. We have all heard that 1st and 10 is the only neutral down in football; I disagree. I believe 4th and 3 can be just as neutral (especially in high school ball), and cause a defensive coordinator to pause and ponder before he makes his call.

A disadvantage of having a reputation of being a "go for it" coach is that defenses will prepare for it accordingly and just like with every other offensive strategy, they will adjust and figure it out eventually. I believe that going for it every now and then on 4th down will prevent the defense from getting a bead on the offense and its playcaller. The opposing coach will not be sure if he should make a 3rd down call or a 2nd down call. I have always believed that a good Offensive Coordinator is good at casting doubt in the opposing teams defensive players and coaches.

A coach that plans on going for it on 4th down should go into a game with a menu of 4th down play calls just like we all go into a game with a menu of two-point play calls. All 4th down play calls cannot be from a heavy set with extra offensive linemen put in the game. If that is the

case, you may not want to attempt a 4th and 4 at midfield. Remember, if you change personnel, the defense will likely change personnel.

In college football, there is a real momentum factor when teams make it, backed up by data: On drives in which teams convert at least one fourth down, they score a touchdown or field goal on 70.7 percent of the possessions and average 4.4 points per drive, compared to 34.8 percent scoring and 2.1 points per drive on other drives. The analytics are obviously different for a high school coach. High school coaches must consider their kicking game; a kicking game that is not as efficient as the ones you find in college ball. Most high schools do not have a kicker who can make a field goal if the ball is outside of the 20 or 30-yard lines. Similar consideration must be given to whether or not to punt once the offense crosses the 40-yard line. If we punt it into our opponent's endzone from the 35, what are we really gaining?

Since the start of 2021, Georgia has led all Power 5 teams (and is second in the FBS) in their fourth-down conversion rate (73.5 percent). During that span, UGA has gone for it on 16.7 percent of its fourth-down opportunities, 120th in the FBS. Some believe their average is so high because they are more picky about when they go for it; in other words, they pick their spots. The data shows Georgia may have been too careful: Georgia is 12-for-14 on fourth-and-1 during the past three seasons (85.7 percent), second-best among Power 5 teams during that span. But Georgia has only gone for it on just 53.8 percent of its fourth-and-1 chances since

2021, 62nd among 65 Power 5 teams. I will not argue with a team's choices when they have been as successful as the Dawgs over the past three seasons.

Coach Smart has this to say about their fourth-down strategy:

*"I think it depends on the flow of the game. I think it depends on your defense and the kicking game," Georgia HC Kirby Smart said. "If you're not giving up a lot to take a smaller risk then you're gaining a chance to score points. At the end of the day, the ultimate goal is to score more points than the other team. ...*

*"It's hard to say what's right or wrong; it only comes out right if it works. It only comes out wrong if it doesn't. But I don't look at it that way. I only look at it as can you out-execute the other team, can you stop the other team, and what do you think the point totals are going to be."*

The decision to go for it on 4th down is complex and often controversial. Coaches must weigh multiple factors and make a calculated risk assessment based on the specific game situation. The choice to be bold and go for it can pay off in a big way by breathing new life into a drive and potentially securing a victory. On the flip side, it carries significant risks that can lead to disastrous outcomes. As football continues to evolve, analytics and data-driven decision-making have begun to play a more prominent role in shaping these crucial choices. Ultimately, going for it on 4th down remains one of the most intriguing and debated aspects of the sport, showcasing the intersection of strategy, psychology, and statistics in football.

# JOB SEARCH PREP FOR COACHES

## HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE COVER LETTER FOR A HEAD COACH SEARCH



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Writing an effective cover letter for a head coach position requires a balance of showcasing your coaching philosophy, experience, and skills while expressing genuine interest in the specific program you're applying to.

Here's a guide to help you structure and write a compelling cover letter:

### Header:

Include your contact information, the date, and the contact details of the hiring institution or search committee.

### Salutation:

Address the cover letter to the appropriate person, if possible. If the job posting doesn't provide a specific name, use a generic salutation such as "Dear Hiring Committee."

### Introduction:

*Express Enthusiasm:*

- Start with a strong opening that expresses

your enthusiasm for the coaching position and the specific program and institution.

- Mention how you learned about the job opening.

*Establish Connection:*

- Briefly mention any connection you have to the institution or program, such as previous encounters, knowledge of the team, or alumni connections.

### Body:

*Coaching Philosophy:*

- Clearly articulate your coaching philosophy. Define your approach to player development, team culture, and on-field strategies.
- Highlight any unique aspects of your coaching style that align with the values of the college program.

*Professional Experience:*

- Provide a brief overview of your coaching career, emphasizing key achievements, milestones, and successful seasons.
- Use metrics or specific examples to quantify your impact, such as win-loss records, championship victories, or player achievements.

*Player Development:*

- Discuss your commitment to player development, both athletically and personally.
- Share success stories of players you've coached who have excelled on and off the field.

*Recruiting Expertise:*

- If applicable, mention your recruiting experience and successes. Highlight your ability to identify and attract top talent to the program.

*Adaptability and Leadership:*

- Showcase instances where you demonstrated

adaptability in response to challenges or changes.

- Emphasize your leadership skills, including your ability to motivate and inspire a team.

### Closing:

*Fit with the Program:*

- Reiterate your interest in the position and express why you believe you are an excellent fit for the program.
- Connect your coaching philosophy and experience directly to the goals and values of the institution.

*Call to Action:*

- Express your eagerness to further discuss how your coaching philosophy aligns with the program in an interview.
- Include your contact information and availability for an interview, phone call, or zoom chat.

*Closing Salutation:*

End the letter with a professional closing, such as "Sincerely" or "Best Regards."

### Additional Tips:

- Keep the cover letter concise and focused, ideally within one page.
- Tailor the letter to the specific job description and the unique characteristics of the program and institution.
- Use a professional tone and avoid generic or clichéd language.
- Proofread carefully to eliminate any errors. Remember, your cover letter should complement your coaching resume and serve as an introduction that encourages the hiring committee to review your qualifications more thoroughly.

### Need Additional Help?

If you need help with your coaching resume, your portfolio, or the interview process, be sure to sign up for one of our job prep packages at [The Coaching Portfolio Guide!](#) We provide services that assist with all aspects of the job search process for coaches. Visit [www.coachingportfolio.com](http://www.coachingportfolio.com) to get started today!

CLICK FOR MORE INFORMATION

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# LEADERSHIP

## PART 2: BE, KNOW, DO



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In the last volume, I wrote about the 1948 US Army leadership "checklist." We covered the 11 Principles you needed to follow to be a good leader. But, I really find that concept lacking. Having a list of actionable items doesn't somehow make you a better leader. We have to rethink leadership and what it truly means to be a leader.

The Army saw this too. And, as they will, they wrote more doctrine to help Soldiers become better leaders individually. The new leadership model enveloped the entire Soldier with a new slogan, "The leader of Character and Competence Acts to Achieve Excellence." "Be, Know, Do" was born. The new model has a triple threat built in as well, with each piece feeding into the other two.

### Be:

"Be" is defined as your inner strength. It can be measured in character. Character is often broken down into two parts. Someone's values, which the US Army gives to us in the acronym LDRSHIP (Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor,

Integrity, Personal Courage) and their mental, physical, and emotional attributes. Be is also the bond that ties the other two pieces together. "Be"ing a leader requires that you KNOW what to do and that you DO it. A leader with high character will never have a fear of DOing, because they'll KNOW what's right and just act. As coaches, we have to model what right looks like to our players and even our staff. In the perfect world, parents, admin, and community members will be better people trying to emulate us. But, most of this is done with our actions. You must demonstrate your character, your values, through your actions, not just your words. Having a moral compass and values that are unwavering is just the beginning. This is something you're usually taught early in life or pick up along the way. The rest is something that you must practice every day, until it becomes a habit. You can't talk the talk and not walk the walk or you'll send a soured message that being a man of character is just something people talk about.

### Know

A leader cannot be a leader without a certain level of knowledge about their respective field. In football, you absolutely do not have to be the next Hal Mumme or Brent Venables. You don't have to know every single aspect of the game of football to coach kids. You do, however, have to know enough to make yourself useful to your program and your players. We call this competence. The US Army defines competence through four "skill domains."

**Interpersonal skills** - knowing your people, their strengths and weaknesses, and how to get

the most out of them.

**Conceptual skills** - the knowledge of and ability to use doctrine (your scheme and all of its rules and nuances) and other ideas (rules of the game, run fits, blocking angles, etc) required to do your job.

**Technical skills** - how to use your equipment. In our industry this may be drills, computer programs like Hudl, QuikCut, SkyCoach, etc or simply how to disassemble and repair helmets and shoulder pads.

**Tactical skills** - the ability to make correct decisions in the management of troops in the heat of battle. Once again, in football this is the "art" of being a coach. Doing your job when the lights are on and the points matter.

You likely will not master all of these early in your career. You'll start with some simple Xs and Os, you'll learn to fix helmets, you'll learn to stat games and break down film. Then, as you gain years of experience you'll learn more and more until it's time to move up a level of responsibility. This is yet another spot where true leaders shine. You shouldn't be happy only learning your job, you should always be learning and practicing your skills so as to be able to do your boss's job. The more years you coach, and as your roles increase, you'll face new types of people, concepts, technology, and tactics and you can continue to learn them and add to your toolbox. As a leader, you should constantly be on the lookout for new opportunities to "sharpen your sword," or add to your tool box. Remember, these are all tied together. You'll have to have the character, one that can stand against the fear of failure, to jump into the arena and put what

you know into action. This will only amplify your knowledge, as you learn from your successes and, maybe more so, your mistakes.

### Do

The DO section of this model is based on exactly what you'd think, the actions of leaders. The actions of leaders consists of:

**Influencing** - making decisions within your operating environment, communicating whatever your decisions are to those that need to know, and motivating others to carry out the plan.

**Operating** - the plans you create, decisions you make, or actions you take to carry out your mission, or your organization's mission statement.

**Improving** - simple stated, leaving things better than you found them. What you do to improve the organization throughout your tenure, making it easier to accomplish your mission in the future.

These things may all seem simple enough on the surface, but having a plan and acting upon that plan are often much further apart than you think. You can be the perfect leader on paper, with contingency plans on contingency plans. But, who will you be when the heat is on? What will you do when a parent corners you and demands their kid get more playing time? Who will you be when your starting QB quits in the middle of an important game because he doesn't agree with your play calls? What will be your first move when the community Facebook page turns against you after a failed

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game winning 2-pt conversion? Actions of leaders cannot take a day off, and are even more necessary when everything is against you.

### LT Stephen F. Brown

LT Brown (and the F is for Flavius) was a Union Army officer during the Civil War. In July of 1863 his Brigade was told to march from Maryland to Gettysburg, PA to help stop GEN Robert E. Lee's army from taking the town. For the march, the Brigade was given a "no straggling" order. This meant that troops couldn't stop for anything. A part of that "anything" was water. They couldn't even stop to fill their canteens. To ensure no one stopped for water, the big brass put guards at every water well along the way.

LT Brown, soon realized that the July heat and no water would have a severely adverse outcome for his unit. He collected all of the canteens in his company and ran off to a heavily guarded water well along the path. He filled every canteen and returned to his men, without much problem. And yet even in 1863, word traveled fast. Soon his command was before him and put him under arrest. Because they were marching into battle, they didn't want to reduce their numbers by escorting LT Brown to an actual jail. So, they took his sword and his pistol, which were an officer's symbols of authority, and left him with his men.

As the Brigade reached Gettysburg, LT Brown decided to regain his honor by joining the fight in any way he could. He spotted a hatchet near a wood pile on his march, and retrieved it to make it his only weapon. With no regard for


his own life, he charged into battle against the Confederates. He fought hand-to-hand until he forced a Confederate officer to surrender and captured him as a Prisoner of War (POW), taking the confederate sword and pistol as his own. He fought the rest of the battle, even being injured and deafened by artillery fire.

For his efforts, LT Brown was selected to represent the entire 13th Vermont Infantry as a statue on the battlefield at Gettysburg. Originally, the sculpture had LT Brown holding his hatchet. However, the Government wouldn't allow it, due to it being a tribute to disobedience. Instead, LT Stephen F. Brown is standing tall on that field with a confederate sword hanging on his hip, and a small single hand hatchet at his feet.

In conclusion, leadership is very hard to define. What makes a great leader is the ability to adapt and put to use the tools you have available. The "Be, Know, Do" model is yet another tool to measure yourself, your staff, and even your kids, to determine if you/they are truly being leaders or just "being in charge." In the LT Brown story, he showed that he had the character to do what was right, the knowledge to identify mistakes were being made, and took action in both getting water to his men who were succumbing to heat injuries, and jumping into the fight for his country armed with nothing but a hatchet. As coaches, we likely won't ever have to physically go to battle, but leadership opportunities are everywhere around us. We must study and put into practice the "Be, Know, Do" model of leadership to ensure we are providing the best for our players.

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# ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PLAY CALLING: LEVERAGING MENTAL WARFARE TO GAIN AN EDGE



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Victory often hinges not only on physical prowess but also on the strategic acumen of coaches

orchestrating plays from the sidelines. The art of play calling is a delicate dance of intellect, intuition, and psychological warfare, where each decision holds the potential to shift the momentum of the game. As the clock ticks down and tensions rise, the strategic maneuvers made by offensive and defensive coordinators can spell the difference between triumph and defeat.

### The Science Behind and Importance of Strategic Play Calling in Football

Football is a game of strategy—a complex chess match played out on the gridiron. Every play call is a calculated gamble, with coaches weighing factors such as field position, down and distance, personnel matchups, and opponent tendencies. The psychology behind play calling dives deeper, tapping into the psyche of both players and opponents to gain a strategic advantage.

Strategic play calling encompasses a

multifaceted approach that extends beyond simply selecting a play from the playbook. It involves understanding the psychological dynamics at play—both within one's own team and in the minds of the opposing players and coaches. Coaches seek to outmaneuver their opponents, exploit weaknesses, and dictate the flow of the game by leveraging mental warfare.

The importance of strategic play calling cannot be overstated. In a sport where margins for error are razor-thin, the ability to anticipate, adapt, and outthink the competition can be the deciding factor in securing victory. Whether it's the offensive coordinator dialing up a perfectly timed trick play or the defensive coordinator orchestrating a well-timed blitz to disrupt the quarterback's rhythm, strategic play calling can tilt the scales in favor of one team over the other.

The science behind play calling extends beyond the X's and O's drawn up on a chalkboard. It encompasses a deep understanding of human psychology—both individual and collective—and how it influences decision-making, performance, and outcomes on the field. By tapping into psychological principles such as motivation, confidence, cognitive biases, and emotional resilience, coaches can unlock new dimensions of strategic play calling.

In the following article, we will explore the perplexing interplay between psychology and play calling in football. From the offensive coordinator's playbook to the defensive coordinator's game plan, we will investigate the strategies, tactics, and mind games employed to gain a competitive edge.

In the quest for victory, the battlefield extends far beyond the boundaries of the gridiron. It is a battleground of wits, where strategic ingenuity and psychological prowess reign supreme. Join us as we venture into the world of play calling, where the art of the game meets the science of the mind.

### Chapter 1: Defensive Coordinator Perspective

Defensive coordinators are tasked with not only stopping the opposing team's offense but also with outwitting their offensive counterparts through strategic play calling. This chapter examines the complex world of defensive play calling, exploring the psychological strategies employed to disrupt the opponent's offense and gain a crucial edge on the field.

#### **The Defensive Mindset: Utilizing Psychological Strategies to Disrupt the Opponent's Offense**

At the heart of defensive play calling lies a deep understanding of the opponent's offensive tendencies, strengths, and weaknesses. Defensive coordinators meticulously analyze game film, scouting reports, and player tendencies to formulate a game plan aimed at disrupting the rhythm and flow of the opposing offense. By exploiting psychological vulnerabilities and capitalizing on offensive predictability, defensive coordinators aim to gain a psychological edge over their opponents before the first snap even occurs.

#### **Creating Confusion: Employing Pre-Snap and Post-Snap Adjustments to Confound the Offense**

One of the key objectives of defensive play calling is to create confusion and uncertainty in the minds of the opposing offense. Through strategic

pre-snap alignments, disguised coverages, and post-snap adjustments, defensive coordinators aim to keep the opposing quarterback guessing and off-balance throughout the game. Defensive coordinators force the offense to react on the fly, increasing the likelihood of miscommunication and errors by presenting multiple defensive looks and disguising their intentions.

#### **Psychological Pressure: Implementing Blitzes and Aggressive Defensive Schemes to Rattle the Quarterback**

An effective way to disrupt the opposing offense's rhythm is by applying psychological pressure on the quarterback. Defensive coordinators strategically dial up blitz packages, sending additional pass rushers to harass and intimidate the quarterback. Defensive coordinators aim to force hurried throws, errant passes, and turnovers, thereby exerting psychological pressure on the opposing quarterback and disrupting the offensive flow by overwhelming the offensive line with aggressive blitzes and exotic pressure packages.

#### **Instilling Doubt: Capitalizing on Offensive Tendencies and Predictability to Force Mistakes**

Another psychological strategy employed by defensive coordinators is to capitalize on offensive tendencies and predictability. By studying film and identifying patterns in the opposing team's play calling, defensive coordinators can anticipate and exploit weaknesses in the offensive scheme. Through strategic adjustments and countermeasures, defensive coordinators aim to instill doubt and hesitation in the minds of the opposing players,

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leading to indecision, mistakes, and turnovers on the field.

### ***Defensive Resilience: Building Mental Toughness and Discipline to Weather Offensive Assaults***

In the face of adversity and offensive onslaughts, defensive resilience becomes paramount. Defensive coordinators emphasize mental toughness, discipline, and resilience in their players, instilling a never-say-die attitude that enables them to weather the storm and rise to the occasion when it matters most. Defensive coordinators prepare their players to overcome challenges, bounce back from setbacks, and ultimately emerge victorious on the field by fostering a strong mindset and unwavering confidence in their defensive abilities.

The art of defensive play calling extends far beyond X's and O's—it is a strategic game of psychological warfare aimed at disrupting the opponent's offense, instilling doubt and uncertainty, and ultimately gaining a crucial edge on the field. Through meticulous preparation, strategic adjustments, and unwavering resilience, defensive coordinators harness the power of mental warfare to outwit, outmaneuver, and outperform their offensive counterparts, securing victory for their team.

### **Chapter 2: Offensive Coordinator Perspective**

Offensive coordinators play a critical role in orchestrating the team's offensive strategy. Beyond simply calling plays, they must navigate the psychological battlefield of the gridiron, leveraging mental warfare to gain an edge over the opposing defense.

### ***Understanding the Mindset: The Role of Psychological Warfare in Offensive Play***

### ***Calling***

Offensive coordinators must anticipate how the defense will react to different formations, motions, and plays, and use this insight to outmaneuver their opponents mentally.

Offensive coordinators gain valuable insights into the defensive mindset by studying film, analyzing tendencies, and scouting opponents. They look for patterns, vulnerabilities, and areas of weakness that can be exploited through strategic play calling.

### ***Strategic Deception: Using Misdirection and Trickery to Manipulate the Defense***

One of the most potent weapons in the offensive coordinator's arsenal is strategic deception. Offensive coordinators can keep the defense off balance and create opportunities for big plays by incorporating misdirection, trick plays, and disguised formations into their game plan.

Misdirection plays capitalize on the defense's tendency to key in on certain players or movements, diverting their attention away from the true point of attack. Whether it's a well-timed play-action pass or a cleverly disguised reverse, these deceptive tactics force defenders to hesitate, creating openings for the offense to exploit.

### ***Exploiting Weaknesses: Identifying and Targeting Psychological Vulnerabilities in the Opposing Defense***

Effective offensive coordinators are adept at identifying and exploiting the psychological vulnerabilities of the opposing defense. This may involve targeting specific matchups, exploiting defensive tendencies, or capitalizing on lapses in concentration.

For example, if the defense is known for being aggressive and overcommitting to the run, the offensive coordinator may call for play-action passes to exploit the resulting openings in the secondary. By studying the defense's weaknesses and exploiting them strategically, offensive coordinators can keep the defense on its heels and dictate the tempo of the game.

### ***Maintaining Confidence: Instilling Belief and Resilience in Offensive Players Through Strategic Play Calling***

In addition to outsmarting the defense, offensive coordinators must also inspire confidence and resilience in their players. Strategic play calling isn't just about Xs and Os—it's about instilling belief in the game plan and empowering players to execute with precision and conviction.

Offensive coordinators can build confidence and momentum on the field by calling plays that capitalize on players' strengths and abilities. Whether it's a well-executed screen pass to a dynamic playmaker or a perfectly timed deep ball to a speedy receiver, strategic play calling breeds success and fosters a winning mindset.

### ***Adjusting to Adversity: Using Psychological Tactics to Overcome Defensive Challenges and Obstacles***

In the heat of battle, offensive coordinators must be prepared to adapt and adjust their game plan in response to defensive challenges and obstacles. Whether facing a stifling pass rush, a disciplined secondary, or inclement weather conditions, the ability to think on their feet and make strategic adjustments is paramount.

From halftime adjustments to in-game audibles, offensive coordinators must constantly assess

the situation and make calculated decisions to put their team in the best position to succeed. By maintaining composure, confidence, and a keen understanding of the psychological dynamics at play, offensive coordinators can navigate the challenges of the game and emerge victorious on the scoreboard.

The role of the offensive coordinator extends far beyond simply calling plays. Offensive coordinators can wield the power of psychological warfare to gain a decisive edge over the opposing defense by leveraging strategic deception, exploiting defensive weaknesses, instilling confidence in players, and adapting to adversity.

### **Chapter 3: Common Psychological Principles**

Mastering the art of mental warfare is crucial for both offensive and defensive coordinators seeking to gain an edge over their opponents. This section explores common psychological principles employed by coaches to outwit and outmaneuver their adversaries on the gridiron.

### ***Mental Warfare in Action: Examples of Psychological Strategies Used by Both Offensive and Defensive Coordinators***

Offensive and defensive coordinators employ a variety of psychological strategies to gain an advantage on game day. One such tactic is strategic deception, where coordinators utilize misdirection, trick plays, and unconventional formations to confuse, outsmart and outleverage their opponents. For example, an offensive coordinator may use pre-snap motion

*continued on next page*

to disguise the intended direction of a play, forcing the defense to react instinctively rather than strategically. Conversely, a defensive coordinator may employ disguised coverages or blitz packages to bait the quarterback into making ill-advised throws.

Another psychological strategy commonly used by coordinators is exploiting weaknesses in the opposing team's psyche. This can involve targeting specific players known for mental lapses or exploiting situational vulnerabilities. For instance, an offensive coordinator may repeatedly target a cornerback known for being easily rattled, while a defensive coordinator may dial up pressure on a specific quarterback to exploit his lack of experience under duress.

### ***The Importance of Game Planning: Preparing Players Mentally and Emotionally for Strategic Battles on the Field***

Effective game planning goes beyond drawing up X's and O's on a whiteboard—it involves preparing players mentally and emotionally for the challenges they will face on the field. Coordinators work closely with players throughout the week to instill confidence, focus, and resilience in the face of adversity. This may involve conducting film study sessions to identify opponent tendencies and weaknesses, as well as mental visualization exercises to mentally rehearse key plays and scenarios.

Coordinators must create an environment where players feel empowered and supported to execute their roles effectively. This requires clear communication, positive reinforcement, and trust-building exercises to foster a cohesive

team dynamic. Coordinators can maximize their team's chances of success by preparing players mentally and emotionally for the strategic battles they will face on game day.

### ***Adaptation and Flexibility: The Need to Adjust Play Calling Strategies Based on In-Game Situations and Opponent Reactions***

In football, no game plan survives first contact with the enemy. Effective coordinators understand the importance of adaptation and flexibility in responding to in-game situations and opponent reactions. This requires keen observation, quick thinking, and the ability to make real-time adjustments based on changing circumstances.

For example, if an offensive coordinator notices that the defense is consistently overcommitting to stop the run, they may call for more play-action passes to exploit gaps in coverage. Similarly, if a defensive coordinator identifies a vulnerability in the opponent's offensive line, they may dial up more blitzes or stunts to generate pressure on the quarterback.

### ***The Role of Leadership: Inspiring Confidence and Trust in Players to Execute Strategic Play Calls Under Pressure***

Ultimately, effective play calling is as much about leadership as it is about strategy. Coordinators must inspire confidence and trust in their players to execute strategic play calls under pressure. This requires building strong relationships, fostering open communication, and leading by example both on and off the field.

Coordinators can empower them to rise to the occasion and perform at their best when it matters most by instilling a sense of belief and unity among players. Whether it's rallying the offense for a game-winning drive or marshaling the defense to make a crucial stop, effective leadership is the linchpin of successful play calling in football.

Mastering the psychology of play calling is essential for coordinators seeking to gain an edge over their opponents. By employing strategic deception, exploiting weaknesses, preparing players mentally and emotionally, adapting to changing circumstances, and providing strong leadership, coordinators can leverage mental warfare to outwit and outmaneuver their adversaries on the gridiron.

### ***Final Thoughts***

#### ***The Power of Mental Warfare: Leveraging Psychological Strategies to Gain an Edge in Football***

In the world of football, where physical prowess often takes center stage, it is easy to overlook the profound impact of psychological strategies on the outcome of a game. However, as we have seen, the mind is a powerful weapon on the gridiron. Offensive coordinators use strategic deception and misdirection to outwit opposing defenses, while defensive coordinators employ psychological pressure and disruption tactics to unsettle opposing offenses. Whether through exploiting weaknesses, creating confusion, or instilling doubt, the psychological aspect of play calling can be the difference between victory and defeat.

### ***Looking Ahead: The Continued Evolution and Importance of Psychological Tactics in Football Play Calling***

As football continues to evolve, so too will the importance of psychological tactics in play calling. In an era of advanced analytics and technology, the strategic landscape of the game is constantly shifting, presenting new challenges and opportunities for coaches and coordinators alike. However, amidst these changes, one thing remains constant: the psychological aspect of play calling will always be a critical determinant of success.

Looking ahead, the continued integration of psychological strategies into play calling will be essential for coaches seeking to gain a competitive edge. Whether through advanced scouting techniques, innovative game planning, or effective leadership, the ability to outthink and outmaneuver opponents will remain paramount. As the game becomes increasingly complex and competitive, coaches must continually adapt and refine their psychological tactics to stay ahead of the curve.

The psychology of play calling is a multifaceted and dynamic aspect of football strategy. Coaches and coordinators can gain a significant edge over their opponents, turning the tide of games in their favor by understanding and leveraging psychological strategies. As we look to the future, the importance of psychological tactics in football play calling will only continue to grow, cementing its status as a fundamental component of strategic success on the gridiron.

# DRILLS

## TRAINING THE TIGHT ENDS



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Tight ends, one of the most versatile players in today's game. The TE has to block as good or better than an offensive

tackle, often against defensive linemen who are much bigger than they are. They have to catch like a number one receiver, often against guys who are faster and can jump higher than they can. If your offense uses a TE, they might even have to play multiple positions, like fullback, H-back, or even split wide like a WR. You cannot neglect the TE position, and they have to train like a lineman and like a receiver!

Tight ends in our Wing T Power Spread offense are critical for success, in both blocking and receiving as they are the first target on a few passing plays and on RPOs. But we train and value blocking first, as we are a run first offense.

The EDDs for TEs begin almost daily with the offensive linemen. The first thing they work on is footwork, drive blocks, reach blocks, down blocks, seal, pull and of course second level blocking!

The drive block, we use an inside hand down for our stance and they have to work stepping first

with each foot as they will align on either side of the formation based on the call. They take a quick power or drive step to the target and attack the defender in attempt to drive them off the ball or two reset the line of scrimmage up field.

For the down block we have a slightly different aiming point, as this block is perhaps the most used by our TE and is usually against bigger defensive tackles. The purpose for our offense with the down block is to prevent penetration into the backfield and seal the running lane for the ball carrier. The footwork is at an angle or flat depending on the distance of the target defender, and the aiming point is for the inside hand to strike the chest and the outside hand to strike the ribs or shoulder of the defender with the head out of the way of contact still. This is to turn the defender and take him off of his path to the ball carrier.

The reach block is more of a drive block to a defender that is aligned further away than a shade on the TE. The footwork on this block is a flat lateral step (depending on the defender's speed, this step may lose ground like a bucket step) while keeping the shoulders parallel to the LOS. Then engaging the defender like a drive block and pushing him up field.

We use the TE for counter runs so he must be able to pull like an offensive guard. We do not skip pull so this is a more traditional bucket step with a dip and rip of the outside arm into a "sprint" to the hole and then break down into contact with the defender.

We will work double teams with our tackles and second level down blocks as they are often responsible for the LB in our run game. They will work pass protection, however they only pass block if we are in a max protect call as they are in a route in all our standard passing plays. For second level blocking we have a linebacker that we have the TE get up to and block. For second level blocking we use a hand strike with our hips lifting the defender from his position making him unable to get to the ball carrier.

To work the passing game, we have the TEs work on their release as they use a three point stance unless they are flexed out, then they would use a two point receiver stance. Their release is to look the same on every pass play to keep the defense from knowing what route they are in. Typically, this is an outside rip release across the DE. If it is an inside release it is to look like it is a second level down block to again keep the defender guessing on what the play is.

We have the TEs involved in our 7 v 7 periods so they can work on routes and catching. To further improve their hands, we will have them catch at times when the QBs are warming up, to get them more catches and soft hands. In the install period of the season, we will run the same play from the same formation so they can rep it over and over again with the correct hand down and release. Once the season begins, and we are not adding any passing plays our 7 v 7 period will be any pass play called in the huddle, our TE route usually does not change once we install the play. We may change route depth, or angle slightly to adjust the defense we see on film

that week.

The tight end is a versatile combo player who has to block, run routes and catch. In some offensive systems they may play multiple roles like H back, wide receiver or even full back. Their primary duty in most high school offenses is blocking, so they need to be stronger than most receivers, but faster than a typical lineman. Usually, in passing plays they are defended by linebackers or strong safeties, so they can have a size advantage at times. In the run game blocking, they are often having to block bigger defensive linemen or faster linebackers, so their technique has to be on point to win as often as they can to keep the offense flowing.

# COACH LIKE A TEACHER AND TEACH LIKE A COACH

## HANDSHAKES



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*Tom Walls is a transplanted American, Wing-T Coach, living in Winnipeg, Canada. He has been coaching football and teaching in various venues and levels for over 30 years. What follows are excerpts from his upcoming book: Coach Like a Teacher and Teach Like a Coach. Each article focuses on a simple, yet effective, technique you can use in your classroom and on the football team to create buy-in from adults and teenagers.*

This is an idea I got from my friend Coach Hugh Wyatt. The concept is simple, players will shake hands with all of the coaches before and after practice. This has been one of the easiest and most effective actions for creating a connection between players and coaches. We preform a traditional handshake, and not a fist bump or high five, because we feel it is a skill that young people are not being taught. In the beginning of practice it is not a formal process. Kids are

getting to the field and out of the locker room at different times. However, at the end of practice this tradition has evolved to a process similar to a wedding receiving line. Following our team talk, the kids will line up and shake each coach's hand. The process goes quickly and I usually find something positive to say about each kid, "Nice tackle in team period", "Great catch in indy", or even "Your hair looked great today." What has been especially useful about this action is that if I have had to get on a kid in practice, when we shake hands I can pull him aside and make sure that we are still alright. It has a similar effect to the spousal agreement that you never go to bed angry.

Historians believe that the modern handshake is at least 3,000 years old, based on an engraving of the Kings of Babylonia and Assyria sealing an alliance with the grasping of open opposite hands. Modern psychologists believe that a firm handshake causes people to be more open and less neurotic in terms of trusting each other. Shaking hands has become so habitual in our program, that our coaches will greet, and say good bye, to each other with a handshake. I have had the same staff for the past five years. I consider them some of my closest confidants. We occasionally disagree, but we have an unspoken bond of respect that I believe has been fostered by shaking hands.

A few years ago I decided to try handshakes in my classroom. Currently I am a high school, at-risk teacher, in a specialized program. My students stay with me all day and I teach them all of the core curriculums. Their entry to my classroom

is similar to my football players. They do not all arrive as the bell rings (although this technique could easily be done if you were to greet your students at the door) as many have staggered start times or wrestle with tardiness. However, wherever I am they will make their way over and give me a brief handshake. If they forget or avoid me, I will sometime during the morning, wander over and casually put out my hand. I have never been refused. At the end of the day, I'll stand by the door and get a quick handshake as they exit. Again, rarely does this get avoided, but if it does, I do not force the issue. I just offer it again the next day. At-risk kids will test your consistency.

One of my favourite handshake stories involves a student named Dave. Dave was a giant. Easily 6'5 and three hundred pounds. Despite his size, Dave was not a bully. When confronted with a challenge, Dave would more likely go into flight than fight mode. This included academic and vocational challenges. In my program, students do entry level internships at various local business. One of my responsibilities is to do drop-ins checking on their progress. Once, during a drop-in for Dave, I found him hiding from me behind a stack of lumber. Laughing, as I made him come out, I said, " You had better find some more 2x4s than that to hide your big body." Dave eventually made his "Magic 30" (30 credits to graduate in Manitoba) and we wished him good luck (because we all thought he was going to need it). A few years ago Dave came back to visit. He had gotten a position at the Winnipeg International Airport and after going from casual to perment he became part of the

union. He had his own car and was preparing, with help of his social worker, to move out of his mom's home. We were all proud and a bit surprised. After all, this was the kid who had inspired the phrase, "Dave and Go Seek" which was what we now called work visits. Regardless, it was a great visit and we were all very happy for him. A few months later, I was catching a red eye out of Winnipeg to go visit my son in Philadelphia. As I walked down the sky bridge and made the turn to the alcove, where they hold the oversized carry-ons for passengers who tried to get one over on the airline, there stood all 6'5 of Dave in his bright yellow, florescent, safety jacket. As I walked towards him, our eyes met and without staying a word, we shook hands as I walked past him boarding the plane.

Handshakes work.





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