

## CYFFA Senior Division Vocabulary and Position Play

The CYFFA Senior Division teams consist of 8 players on each side. The team that is in possession of the ball is said to be on **offense**. Their objective is to score points and to keep the ball from the other team. The team without possession of the ball is said to be on **defense**. Their objective is to stop the offensive team from scoring, to get the ball back and to score themselves. Before each play the ball is placed at the **line of scrimmage** by the referee. The offense attempts to advance the ball to the **goal line**, and the defense tries to stop them.

The offensive team and defensive teams line up in **formation** prior to the snap of the ball. Many different formations are possible. Let's first look at some offensive formations and positions.

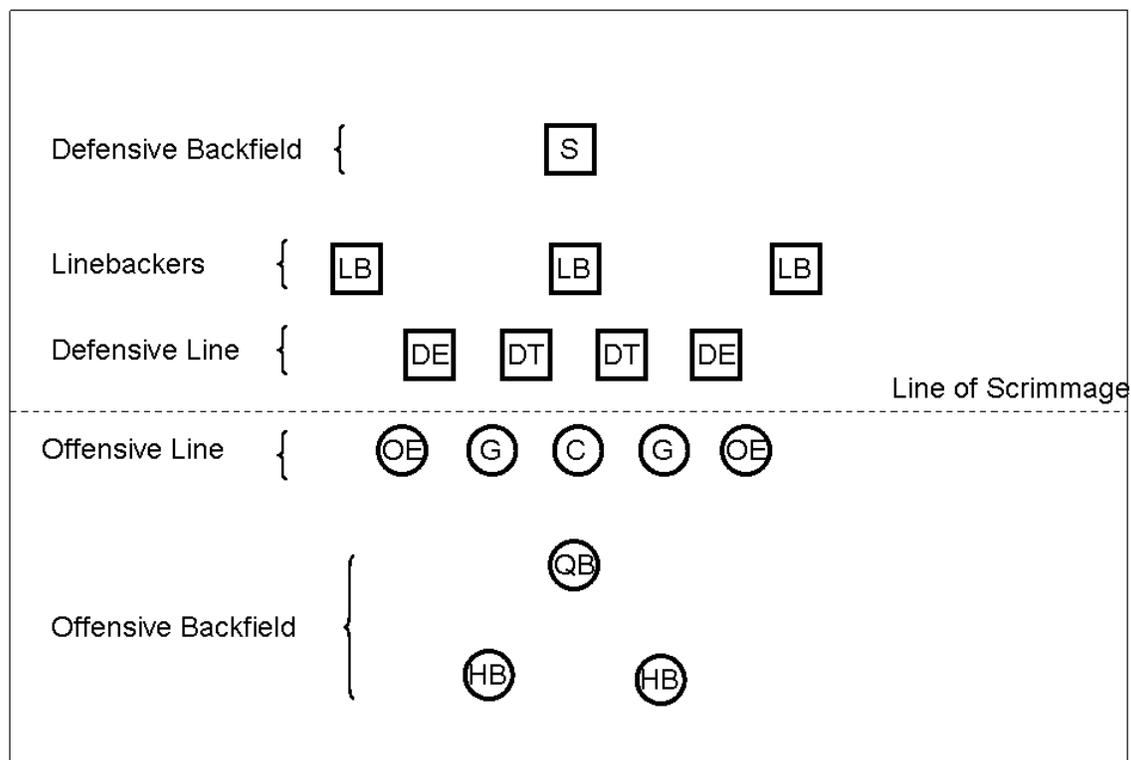


Figure 1. Split Back Offense vs 4-3-1 Zone Defense

**Offensive line:** This consists of five players lined up even with the line of scrimmage. In the formation in Figure 1, the **center** will snap the ball, the **guards** are the two positions on either side of the center, and the **ends** are next to the guards. The two outermost positions on the offensive line (the two ends) are said to be **eligible** receivers; this means that they can legally catch a pass. Players on the offensive line who are not eligible may not catch a pass (penalty for ‘ineligible receiver’). Offensive ends may be close to the guards (**tight end**) or split far away from the guards (**wide out**).

**Offensive backfield:** The remaining three players make up the offensive backfield. These may be arranged in many different ways, but they may never line up on the line of scrimmage with the offensive line (penalty: illegal formation). In Figure 1, the **quarterback** receives the ball from the center to begin the play. The other two positions in this formation are the **halfbacks**. This offensive formation is called a **split back formation** because the halfbacks are split evenly behind the quarterback. An alternative is to line up the backs in a straight line with the quarterback; in this case the back closest to the quarterback is the **fullback**, and the back farthest away is the **tailback**. This alternative is called the **I formation**. A more general term for halfbacks, fullbacks and tailbacks is **running back**.

The defense is charged with stopping the offense, and winning the ball back for their offensive team. The defense may play any position or formation they wish; they are not constrained by the rules to line up in any particular place. Defenses are usually said to be a **man-to-man defense**, where a defensive player lines up against each offensive player and follows them throughout the play, or a **zone defense** where defensive players are responsible for certain areas on the field. A zone defense is usually described by the number of players in the short, medium and deep zones. For example, Figure 1 shows a **4-3-1 zone** with 4 players on the line of scrimmage, 3 covering the middle zone 1 covering the deep zone. We will also play a **4-1-3 zone** in obvious passing situations, or a **5-3 zone** in obvious running or **goal-line** situations.

**Defensive line:** Although there are no rules requiring it, there is usually a group of players that line up opposite the offensive lineman to prevent movement past the line of scrimmage. In Figure 1 there are two **tackles** lined up opposite the center, and two **ends** to engage the other offensive linemen.

**Linebackers:** The defensive players stacked just behind the defensive line are called the linebackers. They are normally responsible for the middle zone areas. In Figure 1 there are two **outside linebackers** and one **inside** or **middle linebacker**. In a **4-1-3 zone** defense there is only one linebacker.

**Defensive backfield:** The defensive backfield is the last line of defense to protect the goal. The deepest position is usually called the **safety**. In Figure 1, there is one deep safety. In a 4-1-3 zone there are three deep safeties and in a 5-3 zone there is no safety. It is not unusual in a man-to-man defense to have a safety with no specific man responsibility (he just plays the ball).

## **Playing Positions**

Each player on the field has a responsibility on every play. Offensive schemes are designed to deceive or overpower defensive players. Sometimes big plays are the result of a well designed and well executed offensive scheme. Other times they result due to a breakdown in coverage by the defense.

**Offensive positions:** The offensive has a huge advantage at the start of every play. They know which direction the play is going, who will carry the ball, and if the play will be a pass or a run. By using this knowledge, along with practice and conditioning, the offense should be able to move the ball down the field.

**Center:** The center is one of the most important positions on the field. He is responsible for forming the **huddle** before the play. He is responsible for snapping the ball on the correct **snap count** as called in the huddle. And he has a key role in blocking on running plays and providing protection for the quarterback on passing plays.

At the start of every offensive play, the center snaps the ball. It is imperative that the snap occur on the desired snap count, as called in the huddle. The quarterback may line up directly under center, or may be in the **shotgun** formation (a few feet behind the center in obvious passing situations). In either case, a bad snap from the center will almost always kill the chances for success before the play gets started. A snap on the wrong snap count will usually result in a penalty for illegal movement by the offensive team or even a fumble if the quarterback is not expecting the ball. The center is responsible for delivering the ball to the quarterback so that the quarterback can take over control. This requires a firm placement of the ball right where the quarterback is expecting it.

Once the ball is snapped, the center blocks the tackle playing directly in front of him. If the play is a run to the right, the center moves to the right and **seals** his man to the left side. The center should stay with his man as long as possible; the objective in this case would be to make the tackle run around him to the left. If the center can hold the block for a few seconds, the tackle will have little hope of catching up with the play going to the right. Most running plays rely on a seal block from the center. An exception would be when a **quarterback sneak** play is called; this requires straight-ahead blocking and relies on the center overpowering his man to gain a yard or two.

On passing plays, the objective is to keep the onrushing defensive lineman from getting to the quarterback. The center and guards form a protective **pocket** around the quarterback, allowing him enough time to pick out an open receiver and to throw the pass.

**Guards:** The guards are the working men of the offensive line. On every play they engage the defensive tackles and ends. On running plays they open holes for the running backs and on passing plays they guard the quarterback. Without good play at the guard position, an offense can't get very far at all.

When a running play is called, it will usually go either to the left or right. This means for that one play, one guard will be the **strong side** guard (direction of the play) and the other will be the **weak side** guard (away from the play). The strong side guard blocks the tackle directly in front of him by sealing him away from the play. The strong side guard should stay with the tackle as long as they can. The weak side guard only stays with his tackle (again with a seal block) for a second. By holding the tackle up for a second, he

will probably not be able to catch up with the play going away from him. After engaging the tackle for a second, the weak side guard engages the linebacker who is coming over to pursue the play going to the strong side. This block should be held until the running back is past the linebacker.

On passing plays the guards must stop the pass rushers from disrupting the quarterback. In pass protection situations, the guards may use their hands as long as they are not grabbing or holding their opponent. Usually the best technique is to push the upper body or shoulders so that the pass rushers go past the quarterback. To accomplish this requires good body position (knees bent, back straight, weight balanced) and quick feet. Pass blocking is not reaching out and grabbing; it's moving your feet to stay between the quarterback and your opponent (much like playing defense in basketball: stay between the man with the ball and the basket).

**Offensive Ends (also called Offensive Tackle):** The offensive end position requires versatility, speed and power. Since this position is an eligible pass receiver, precise pass routes and good hands are a must. A speedy receiver running a deep pass route can 'stretch the defense' and create opportunities for other teammates as well as themselves. In addition to this role, the ends have blocking duties on running plays. Once again, the offensive end has the advantage of knowing the type of play and the direction of the play prior to the snap.

On running plays there is a strong side (direction of the play) and a weak side (opposite direction of the play) end. The path of the ball carrier is usually designed to be either between the offensive tackles (**inside run**) or outside of the tackles (**outside run**). On an inside run, the end should seal his opponent to the outside (away from the center). On an outside run, the end should seal his opponent inside (toward the center). To accomplish this, the end must have swift foot movement to get his body in position to seal the defensive player. These blocks should be held until the running back is past the blocking area.

On passing plays, ends are eligible receivers. The play called in the huddle will identify the **primary receiver**, who is the intended target of the pass play. The other end is usually a **secondary receiver**, who is checked if the primary receiver is covered. In all cases it is important that the receiver runs the pass routes the way they are drawn up in the playbook; if the quarterback and the receiver aren't running the same play, the result could be an interception or a sack. When a pass is completed, the secondary receiver immediately becomes a blocker for the primary receiver. It is important that once a catch is made, the receiver does not stop running until the play is whistled dead by the referee. Too often an offensive player will miss a scoring opportunity by stopping because they thought they were flagged.

**Quarterback:** The quarterback is the leader on the field; he gets the play from the sideline and calls it in the huddle. It is the responsibility of the quarterback to clearly state the formation, the play and the snap count in the huddle. The play is called twice to

make sure everyone heard and knows the play. If there is a misunderstanding, the quarterback can call **time-out** to discuss the play with the coach.

Once the play is understood, the quarterback **sets the line**. Based on the formation and play called, the quarterback makes sure that everyone is in their proper places. If someone is in the wrong place the quarterback will direct them to move; if there still seems to be confusion he may need to call a time-out. Once in position, the quarterback **calls the signals**. The quarterback calls out “ready” to warn his teammates that all movement must soon stop; he calls “set” which signifies all movement has stopped; and he calls “hut” a number of times depending on the snap count. The quarterback receives the snap from the center to start the play.

On running plays, it is the responsibility of the quarterback to place the ball directly into the stomach of the ball carrier. This usually involves quick footwork and supple hands. Too hard or too soft on the handoff usually results in a fumble.

On some plays the quarterback acts as a lead blocker. In these cases the use of hands should be minimized (keep them in close to the body) and stay between the opponent and the ball carrier.

On passing plays, the quarterback must be a quick decision maker and an accurate passer. The first task is to look for the primary receiver. If they are open, the pass is delivered. If not, the quarterback must quickly decide to look for the secondary receiver, throw the ball away, take off running or accept a loss of yardage (**sack**).

**Running Backs:** The running backs may run with the ball, are eligible receivers for passes, and are frequently asked to block for their teammates. Basic running plays can go to the **inside** (between the offensive ends) or to the **outside** (around the offensive ends).

Inside running plays exploit gaps between offensive linemen who seal their opponent away from the direction of the play. In Figure 1, there are gaps for inside running plays between the center and guard (this play is called a **dive**) and between the guard and the offensive end (this play is called a **slant**).

Outside running plays are called against a defense that is strong in the middle. It relies on speed and good blocking to get the running back around the corner and into the open down the sideline. An outside running play where several blockers lead the way for a running back is called a **sweep**. A play where the offensive end heads towards the quarterback for a handoff is called an **end around**. Any play where the ball carrier hands off to a different player heading in the opposite direction is called a **reverse**. The danger of outside running plays is that the play starts with the ball carrier moving towards the sideline rather than toward the goal. It is important that the runner exploits the first opportunity to advance **up field**, toward the goal.

**Defensive Positions:** A defensive player does not know what the offensive play is at the snap of the ball, but they are free to move and position themselves for the best

opportunity to stop the play. Depending on the defensive formation, a player may line up directly across from the opposing player (**head up**), or he may wish to position slightly inside or outside of their opponent (**shade**) to exploit a gap. Defensive alignments may call for linebackers or safeties to position directly behind other defensive players (**stack**) or to be slightly **offset**. The players may position themselves at different distances from the line of scrimmage (called **depth** or **cushion**). On all defensive plays, each defender must understand their responsibilities on running plays and on passing plays.

Sometimes defensive players will be asked to rush the quarterback even though that is not their normal responsibility on a pass play. This exception is called a **blitz**. Linebackers or safeties may be asked to blitz. Defensive linemen may be asked to rush the quarterback through different gaps than normal (for example, two defensive linemen may cross and avoid the guard they normally engage and attack the off side guard. This is called a **stunt**. A stunt causes confusion on the offensive line and frequently results in two offensive linemen blocking one defensive lineman with the other defensive lineman unblocked.

**Defensive Tackle:** The tackle is responsible for covering the inside gaps on running plays. Their first look thought should be filling the gaps and flagging the running back. On pass plays, the tackles **rush the passer**. Come in with hands up to block a pass and if the opportunity arises, bring the hands down to the flags to sack the quarterback.

**Defensive End:** The defensive end is responsible for keeping running plays inside. He does this by rushing directly up the field to cut off any outside runs. This is called **containment**. By beating the running back to the outside spot, the running back is forced back inside, where tackles and linebackers can make the play. If the running back breaks the containment of the defensive end, they will likely have a long gain before a linebacker or safety can get the flag. A common mistake for a defensive end is to take an inside (toward the ball) rush on an outside running play.

Another key aspect of defensive end play is to make sure you don't give up when plays go away from you. The containment responsibility is still yours, and if the ball is reversed you must make the play. Covering your area of the field and being ready for the reverse is frequently called **staying at home**.

On passing plays, the defensive end rushes up the field as usual, but tries to beat his opponents block to get to the quarterback. Come in with hands up to block the pass first, and then bring them down to get the flag. Even on pass plays, the defensive end must be sure to not allow the quarterback to break containment and get outside where defenders are sparse.

**Linebackers:** Linebackers usually get the most flags. They are positioned to stop running plays by **reading** and **reacting** to the direction of the play. Since they are usually not engaged in blocks by the offensive line, they can quickly come up on running plays and grab flags. On passing plays, the linebackers must drop back into their zones and react to any receivers that come into their zone. Keep the receiver between you and

the quarterback (**in front** of you) until the ball is thrown to prevent a long gain on a completion. When the ball is in the air, react to where the ball is thrown. The best outcome is that you are in a better position to make the catch than the receiver is. In this case, go for the **interception**. If the receiver has better position, try to **knock down** the pass with a hand. If you can't get an interception or a knock down, position yourself to grab the receiver's flag.

As with defensive ends, linebackers must cover their zones and stay at home. Many offensive plays are designed to take advantage of aggressive linebackers who over pursue the ball carrier and are not prepared for the **cutback** or reverse. Pass coverage must also be maintained until the ball crosses the line of scrimmage.

**Safety:** The safety is the last line of defense. It is important that all plays stay in front of the safety. A pass over the safety or an outside run that gets past the safety will normally go for a touchdown.

On running plays, the safety provides **run support**. The defensive linemen and linebackers have the best opportunities to grab the flag, but the safety is there in case they miss. On passing plays, the safety covers any **deep** pass plays. It is usually best to keep the deep receivers in front of you with a few yards cushion. The deeper the pass, the more time you will have to read the play and react while the ball is in the air. Go for the interception or the knock down.