

Defensive Philosophy in Front Office Football

I would strongly recommend reading and becoming familiar with this section of the help file if you're going to manage your own depth charts and create your own defensive game plans. These are advanced concepts. The AI (or "Rex," as it has been dubbed by long-time Front Office Football players) will happily put out its own depth charts and game plans before each game – all carefully tailored to your next opponent.

In fact, you have to turn off the AI if you want your team to use your game plans and depth charts. You can do this through the Bulletin – Options menu, using the Edit Single-Player Options screen. Commissioners can use the Edit Multi-Player Options screen to edit these settings for the leagues they run.

Once the AI is turned off, the changes you make using the Chronicle – Game Planning menu are used during simulated games.

If you're accustomed to the way Front Office Football used to handle defense, many fundamental concepts have changed. As Front Office Football evolves, as it has for nearly 20 years now, so has professional football. And with fans becoming more sophisticated along with the implementation of all these new offenses and defenses, I think it's a good idea to provide you with the ability to run realistic defensive schemes.

Player Positions and Skills

In Front Office Football, defensive players aren't necessarily tied to their positions the way offensive players are tied. Players have physical attributes and they have defensive skills. The following physical attributes can be important when evaluating players:

Weight: this is often the most important attribute for a player. Physics gives us the reason. The force on an object is equal to mass times acceleration. So to stop an opposing player, a defensive player has to create a change in his acceleration. In order to do this, a player needs both mass and what we call explosion. Since everyone is playing on the same field at the same altitude, we can cancel out the role of gravity and substitute weight for mass.

Weight can be controlled, to a small extent. During training camp, you can ask your players to lose or gain weight. Each player is limited as to how much he can weight train and in what direction, so you can't transform a cornerback into a nose tackle. In Front Office Football, a player's performance is reduced by the difference between that player's weight and the ideal weight for the position he is playing on that particular play.

Height: For some positions, height matters. For defensive backs, the taller you are, the more likely you're able to successfully cover receivers. For defensive linemen – especially linemen in a 34 defense expected to handle two gaps – if you're too short, you will have trouble seeing over offensive linemen and making a good choice as to how to handle the block.

This chart shows the ideal weight for each player at each position in the basic defenses. Players closer to the ideal weight for their assigned position will perform better in games. The darker highlights indicate

defensive positions where more height is also important. Finally, players who are further from the average height/weight ratio for their position might see a small decline in performance. This will be shown on the weight training screen for that player.

Ideal Weight Chart	True 34	34 Eagle	43 Under	43 Over
Nose Tackle	325	312		
Right Tackle			315	309
Left Tackle			306	316
Right End	295	305	280	263
Left End	304	312	275	270
Strong-Side Linebacker	258	256	251	245
Weak-Side Linebacker	262	261	234	246
Middle Linebacker			238	241
Strong Inside Linebacker	242	245		
Weak Inside Linebacker	240	245		
Right Cornerback	197	197	193	193
Left Cornerback	197	197	193	193
Strong Safety	208	208	210	206
Free Safety	206	206	206	206

Combine Numbers: Explosion creates acceleration, which is the other half of Newton’s second law of motion. A player’s combine numbers, therefore, lead to better performance on the field. Look at the bench press and the broad jump to see how much explosion the player creates. There’s more on this topic in the help file article related to the combine – in particular what attributes are most important when evaluating physical skills.

Every year, all players are tested in the combine events. Front Office Football does this because you don’t have actual tape to watch, as real professional coaches have.

The following defensive attributes are also important when evaluating players. Keep in mind that the combine numbers and these attributes are heavily intertwined. Numbers are reported both as a player’s current level in this skill, and what your coaches think this player will be able to do once he has reached his full potential.

Run Defense: A player’s ability to defend against the run.

Pass Rush Strength: A player’s ability to rush the passer.

Pass Rush Technique: A player’s ability to use different techniques to evade blockers. Unlike Pass Rush Strength, this attribute does not decline with age.

Pass Defense, Man to Man: A player’s ability to defend a wide receiver running a pass route.

Pass Defense, Physical: A player’s ability to stick with a wide receiver in the five-yard area where contact is allowed.

Pass Defense, Zone: A player’s ability to defend the pass while watching the quarterback and maintaining a defensive zone.

Pass Intercepting: A player’s ability to catch the ball.

Hard Hitter: A player's ability to bring more force to the point of the tackle. This can cause more injuries.

Play Diagnosis: A player's ability to deduce the play call quickly after the snap.

Endurance: A player's ability to stay on the field for a large number of plays. This is heavily influenced by position. A defensive lineman expends more energy on each play than a defensive back.

Defensive Personnel Charts

Your defensive personnel charts largely determine playing time. You set up six groups of players. The situation and the offense's position group determine which of the six defenses takes the field. This allows you frequent substitution without compromising the integrity of your defense.

Tired players may be substituted in addition to what you've set up in the depth chart. In this case, the game will make an intelligent choice as to who will substitute, and this will be done on a play-by-play basis. If you use the personnel charts to try and force a player to remain on the field too long, he will start "economizing" his performance and you will get a generally reduced level of play. If there's a danger of this happening, you will see the issue come up when you press the "analyze" button on the personnel chart screen.

If it appears that a player will be used beyond his endurance, you'll see a warning when you analyze the depth chart. That player may be less effective in a game as a result, and he will be more likely to become tired and limited in future games.

You can fill each chart with players from pretty much any position. Unlike past versions of Front Office Football, the only penalty for playing someone out of position is that the player may not be physically suited for the job.

If you like, the game will recommend an optimal depth chart for you that attempts to maximize your talent without tiring players unnecessarily. The Game Plan Details screen has a setting allowing you to emphasize an exact position match when filling out the depth chart. The game will pay more attention to a player's stated position in the roster when that setting is higher.

Depth Chart - Defense

Base Defense, Against 2 WR	Base Defense, Against 3 WR	Third Down and Long, Against 0-3 WR	Base Defense, Against 4/5 WR
LDE: LDE 95 Jones <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	LDE: LDE 95 Jones <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	LDE: RDE 76 Daniels <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	LDE: RDE 76 Daniels <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
NT: LDT 98 Guion <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	NT: LDT 98 Guion <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	NT: NT 64 Pennel <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	NT: NT 64 Pennel <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
UT: RDT 94 Thorntor <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	UT: RDT 94 Thorntor <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	UT: LDE 93 Boyd <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	UT: LDE 93 Boyd <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
RDE: RDE 90 Raji <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	RDE: RDE 90 Raji <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	RDE: RDE 90 Raji <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	RDE: LDE 95 Jones <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
SLB: SLB 52 Matthew <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	MLB: SILB 50 Hawk <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	MLB: WILB 59 Jones <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	MLB: WILB 59 Jones <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
MLB: SILB 50 Hawk <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	WLB: SLB 56 Peppers <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	WLB: SLB 56 Peppers <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	LCB: LCB 38 Williams <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
WLB: WLB 53 Perry <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	LCB: LCB 38 Williams <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	LCB: LCB 38 Williams <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	RCB: RCB 37 Shields <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
LCB: LCB 38 Williams <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	RCB: RCB 37 Shields <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	RCB: RCB 37 Shields <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	NCB: RCB 29 Haywar <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
RCB: LCB 31 House <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	NCB: LCB 31 House <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	NCB: RCB 29 Haywar <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	DCB: SLB 52 Matthew <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
SS: SS 42 Burnett <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	SS: SS 42 Burnett <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	SS: SS 42 Burnett <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	SS: FS 33 Hyde <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
FS: FS 33 Hyde <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	FS: FS 33 Hyde <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	FS: FS 21 Clinton-Db <input type="checkbox"/> Lock	FS: FS 21 Clinton-Db <input type="checkbox"/> Lock

56 Julius Peppers OLB

Run Defense	38/60
Pass Rush Technique	72
Man-to-Man Defense	54/78
Zone Defense	33
Bump and Run Defense	37/69
Pass Rush Strength	73
Play Diagnosis	43
Punishing Hitter	83
Endurance	12
Overall	43/53

LDE 7 RDE 7 SLB 8 SILB 8 MLB 7 WLB 7 WLB 9 SS 0 FS 0
6-6, 283 lbs., 13 exp.

Short Yardage, or Against 0/1 WR

LDE: RDE 76 Daniels <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
NT: RDT 94 Thorntor <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
UT: NT 64 Pennel <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
RDE: LDE 93 Boyd <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
SLB: SLB 56 Peppers <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
MLB: SILB 50 Hawk <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
WLB: SLB 52 Matthew <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
LCB: LCB 38 Williams <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
RCB: LCB 31 House <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
SS: FS 21 Clinton-Db <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
FS: SS 42 Burnett <input type="checkbox"/> Lock

Goal-Line Defense

LDE: RDE 76 Daniels <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
LDT: NT 64 Pennel <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
NT: LDT 98 Guion <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
RDT: RDE 90 Raji <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
RDE: LDE 93 Boyd <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
SLB: SLB 56 Peppers <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
MLB: SILB 50 Hawk <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
WLB: SLB 52 Matthew <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
LCB: LCB 38 Williams <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
RCB: RCB 29 Haywar <input type="checkbox"/> Lock
SS: FS 21 Clinton-Db <input type="checkbox"/> Lock

Defensive Coordinator: Capers, Dom (43 Under)

Cancel
Recommend
Analyze
Confirm

Defensive Fronts

Your team's defensive front is tied to your defensive coordinator. Each staff member who specializes on defense runs one of the four defensive fronts available in Front Office Football. Hiring that staff member as defensive coordinator determines your front. That can't otherwise be changed, so be careful when making staff changes.

The personnel for each of the four fronts is slightly different. For those of you who are new to detailed defensive terminology, in a 34, you have three down linemen (hand on the ground) and four linebackers. In a 43, you have four linemen and three linebackers. These seven players are part of the "front" of the defense. The other four players are part of the secondary, though when expecting a run you can put the strong safety in with the linebackers as well, and show an eight-man front.

Personnel changes also affect play-calling. In a nickel personnel set, one linebacker has been replaced by a defensive back. In the dime, two linebackers have been replaced. In a goal-line defense, your free safety is replaced by an additional defensive tackle, essentially giving you a nine-man front, since your strong safety is automatically close to the line.

All offenses in Front Office Football are "right-handed," which means the strong side is the right side, which is generally what you see in professional football with a right-handed quarterback. The tight end

generally lines up on the right side, and the right tackle is often as good a run blocker as he is a pass blocker, while the left tackle, who protects the quarterback's blind side from the big-money defensive ends and weak-side rush linebackers, is almost always the best pass blocker.

These are the defensive fronts available in Front Office Football, and a brief description of player responsibilities.

True 34: This is what we generally think of when we're talking about a 34 defense. The down linemen all have two-gap responsibility.

34 Eagle: This is a little bigger than a true 34 in that the nose tackle shades a little bit to the strong side, and the defensive ends are more hybrid ends/tackles.

43 Under: The defensive front shifts a little to the weak side, much like the 34 Eagle.

43 Over: This is what we generally think of when we're talking about a 43 defense. The defensive front is shifted a little to the strong side.

To understand specifics about a front, I need to explain a few more concepts. The first is "technique," which describes where a defensive player lines up. Terminology can change from team to team with football coaches, but generally an even number means a player lines up directly in front of an offensive player and is responsible for two gaps. An odd number means a player lines up essentially off one of the offensive player's shoulders. This is better suited to rushing into one gap.

The 0-technique is a pure nose tackle. A 1-technique is also often called a nose tackle, but is lined up on one of the center's shoulders. A 2-technique lines up over a guard (2i means on the guard's inside shoulder). A 3-technique lines up on the guard's outside shoulder. Many teams employ three-technique defensive tackles, or even 34 ends. A 4-technique lines up over an offensive tackle. Some teams use defensive ends in 4i-technique, which is on a tackle's inside shoulder. A 5-technique is outside the tackle.

A 6-technique is over the tight end. A 7-technique, strangely, is often used for the position just inside of where a tight end lines up. You see that a lot with rushing linebackers, especially from the weak side. A 9-technique is outside the tight end's position. A second "0" after the technique indicates a player is at least a yard or two from the line of scrimmage. So a 20-technique, for example, would be a linebacker directly across from one of the offensive guards. A classic middle linebacker is in a 00-technique. Outside linebackers, especially when expected to rush the passer, often stand at the line, but aren't in a three-point stance. They may line up a yard or two back, however.

There isn't a lot of difference between 1 and 2i, or 3 and 4i, or 5 and 7. Just a few inches in these cases. In pro football, that means a lot. In Front Office Football, where shoulders really don't have any meaning, it's more about the strengths and weaknesses of the formation.

The second major concept is gap responsibility. The A-gaps are on either side of the center. The B-gaps are between the guards and tackles. The C-gaps are outside of the offensive tackles. Defenses need to "fill" each gap on every running play. In most cases, defensive players are assigned one gap. In 34 defenses, linemen sometimes have two gaps to cover, and need to diagnose the play and prevent one of those gaps from opening. Containment is also an important concept. The defense must worry about runners being able to move toward the sidelines and "turn the corner" downfield.

Here are some notes about player responsibility in each defensive front. The charts below each description show the defense against various personnel sets. The goal-line personnel variation shows the strong safety in the “buzz” position for run support. Nickel and dime defensive backs will line up across from extra receivers.

True 34

Left Defensive End (E): Lines up in the 4-technique across from the right tackle, and is responsible for the B- and C-gaps on the strong side. He does not have to be a great pass rusher, but height and bulk are necessary. Occasionally, you’ll find an athlete like J.J. Watt in this position, but that’s only one every few years.

Nose Tackle (N): Lines up in the 0-technique across from the center, and is responsible for both A-gaps. Since he has to occupy so much space in the interior, if he fails to get to the ball or keep blockers from getting to the inside linebackers this can cause a lot of harm to your run defense.

Right Defensive End (E): Lines up in the 4-technique across from the left tackle, and is responsible for the B- and C-gaps on the weak side.

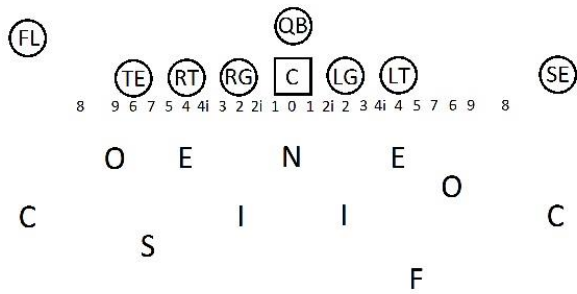
Because these linemen are all lined up directly across from offensive linemen, height is more important than with most linemen.

Strong-Side Linebacker (O): Lines up in the 9-technique outside the tight end, and is responsible for containment on the strong side.

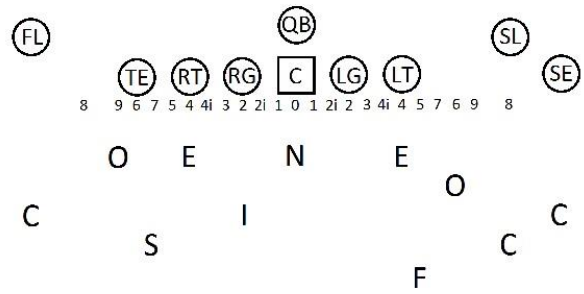
Strong Inside Linebacker (I): Lines up in the 20-technique across from the right guard and has A- and B-gap responsibility on the strong side. Since the linemen all have two-gap responsibilities and the offensive guards are unchecked, inside linebackers in a True 34 have to be big enough to handle them. He is replaced by the sixth defensive back in dime personnel.

Weak Inside Linebacker (I): Lines up in the 20-technique across from the left guard and has A- and B-gap responsibility on the weak side. He is replaced by the nickel back in nickel and dime personnel.

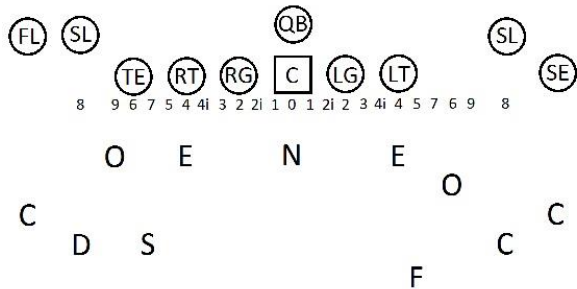
Weak-Side Linebacker (O): Lines up in the 60-technique inside the tight end’s position on the weak side and is responsible for containment. He is often the best blitzler on the defense, and is expected to rush on most pass plays. He will often be just off of the line.



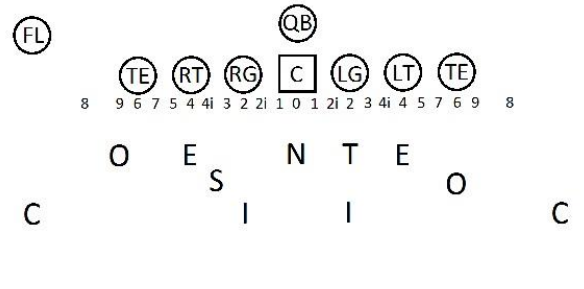
True 34 - Personnel versus 0-2 WR



True 34 - Personnel versus 3WR



True 34 - Personnel versus 4-5 WR



True 34 - Goal Line Personnel

34 Eagle

Left Defensive End (E): Lines up in the 4i-technique just inside the right tackle, and is responsible for the B-gap on the strong side. A defensive end needs to have more mass than most, but since there is only one primary gap responsibility, if there's a lineman in any 34 who can generate high sack numbers, this is usually the guy.

Nose Tackle (N): Lines up in the 1-technique just to the strong side of the center, and is responsible for the strong-side A-gap. He should have the same skill set as the True 34 nose tackle, but he doesn't have to occupy quite as much space.

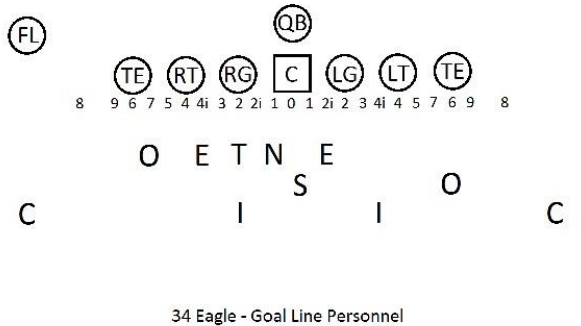
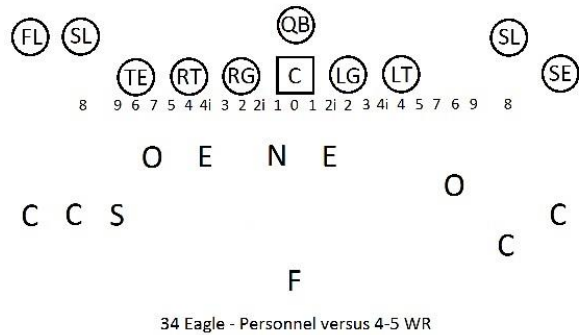
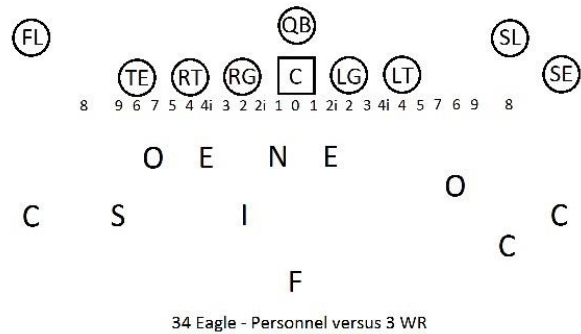
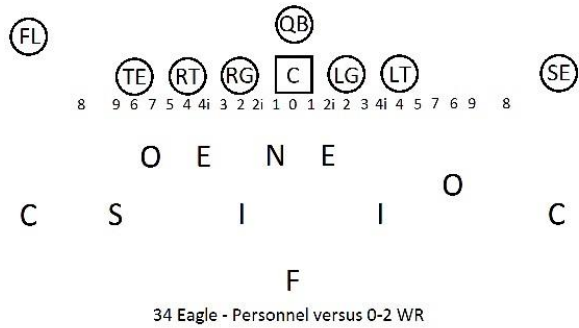
Right Defensive End (E): Lines up in the 2i-technique just inside the left guard, and is responsible for the A-gap on the weak side. In this defense, bigger players need to fill this position. He's more a defensive tackle than an end.

Strong-Side Linebacker (O): Lines up in the 7-technique inside the tight end, and is responsible for the C-gap and containment on the strong side.

Strong Inside Linebacker (I): Lines up in the 20-technique across from the right guard and is responsible for filling open gaps on the strong side. Since the left defensive end helps prevent the right guard from getting to the linebacker, he doesn't always have to fight off a block like he would in a True 34. He is replaced by the sixth defensive back in dime personnel.

Weak Inside Linebacker (I): Lines up in the 4i0-technique between the left tackle and left guard and has extensive responsibility on the weak side, especially toward the B- and C-gaps, because he is protected by the right defensive end/tackle. He is replaced by the nickel back in nickel and dime personnel.

Weak-Side Linebacker (O): Lines up in the 60-technique over the tight end's position on the weak side and is responsible for containment. He is often the best blitzer on the defense, and is expected to rush on most pass plays.



43 Under

Left Defensive End (E): Lines up in the 5-technique outside the right tackle's shoulder, and is responsible for the C-gap on the strong side. In general, defensive ends are smaller and quicker than ends in the 34. These are sometimes even players who could thrive as outside linebackers in a 34. Since he often goes up against the right tackle, who is often the offense's best run blocker, he should be a little stronger than the right end.

Left Defensive Tackle (T): Lines up in the 1-technique to the strong side of the center, and is responsible for the A-gap on the strong side. Since there are four linemen and the 1-technique tackle is always headed into this gap, he should be a little smaller and more athletic than a true nose tackle.

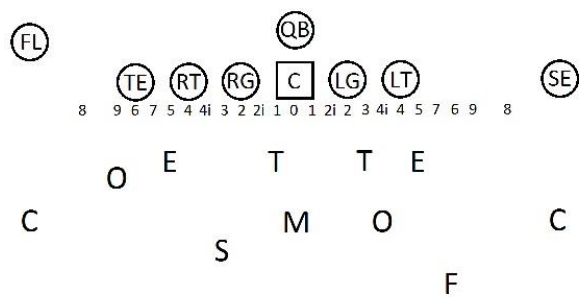
Right Defensive Tackle (T): Lines up in the 3-technique to the outside of the left guard, and is responsible for the B-gap on the weak side. The 3-technique tackle in a 43 can be a little smaller and more athletic than most tackles and may actually generate considerable quarterback pressure.

Right Defensive End (E): Lines up in the 5-technique outside the left tackle's shoulder, and is responsible for the C-gap on the weak side as well as containment. This is often your best pass rusher. Your right defensive end is often one of your top defensive players.

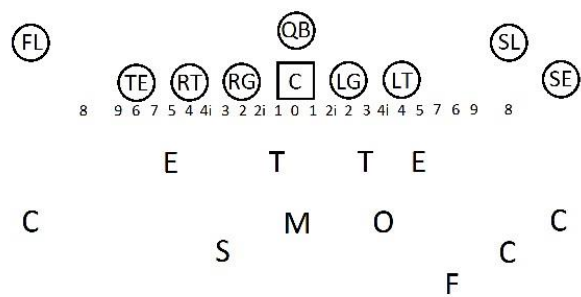
Strong-Side Linebacker (O): Lines up in the 9-technique outside the tight end, and is responsible for containment on the strong side. Off all the 43 linebackers, he has to be the biggest and strongest, because he's often taking on an offensive lineman or a tight end. He is replaced by the nickel back in nickel and dime personnel.

Middle Linebacker (M): Lines up in the 00-technique between the right guard and the right tackle, and is responsible for run support – often the A-gap on the weak side, or even the B-gap on the strong side if the strong safety is not up closer to the line. Since he is often dropping back into pass coverage and is more protected on run plays, he should be smaller and faster than most linebackers.

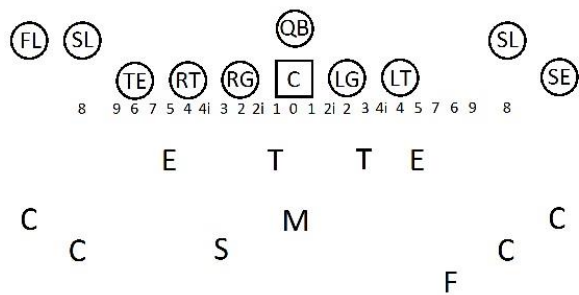
Weak-Side Linebacker (O): Lines up in the 4i0-technique between the left tackle and the left guard, and is responsible for gap support on the weak side. Given all the extra help he has in front of him, a team has the opportunity here to use a smaller, faster athlete who has a nose for the ball. He is replaced by the sixth defensive back in dime personnel.



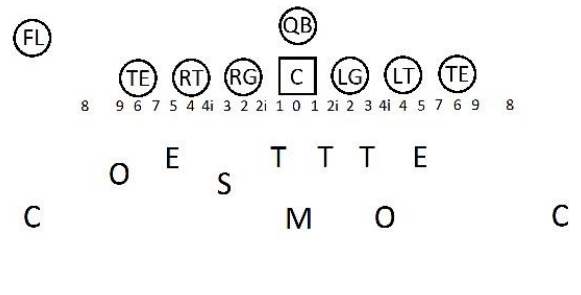
43 Under - Personnel versus 0-2 WR



43 Under - Personnel versus 3 WR



43 Under - Personnel versus 4-5 WR



43 Under - Goal Line Personnel

43 Over

Left Defensive End (E): Lines up in the 9-technique outside the tight end, and is responsible for containment on the strong side. Unlike the left end in the 43 Under, he gets some help with the right tackle, so he can be a lot like the right end in terms of skill set. However, he needs to be a good run defender because if he can't contain under a lot of pressure, the offense has easier access to the outside.

Left Defensive Tackle (T): Lines up in the 3-technique to the outside of the right guard, and is responsible for the B-gap on the strong side. The 3-technique tackle in a 43 can be a little smaller and more athletic than most tackles and may actually generate considerable quarterback pressure.

Right Defensive Tackle (T): Lines up in the 1-technique to the weak side of the center, and is responsible for the A-gap on the weak side. Since there are four linemen and the 1-technique tackle is always headed into this gap, he should be a little smaller and more athletic than a true nose tackle.

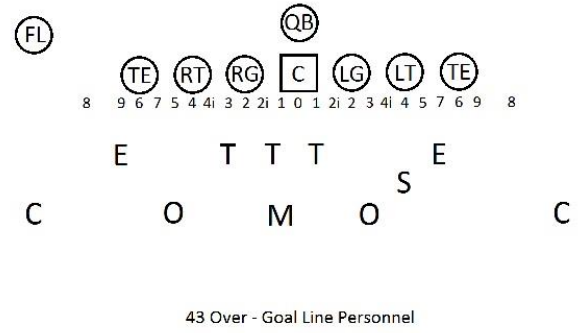
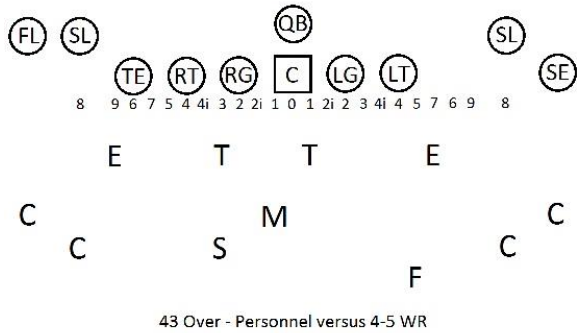
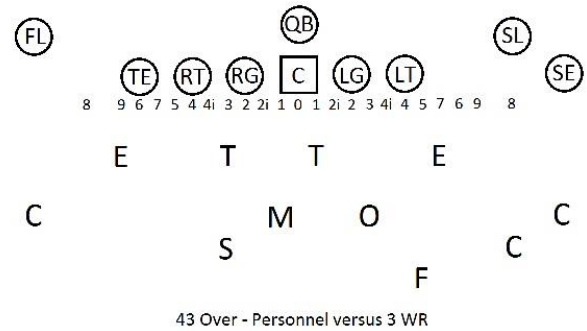
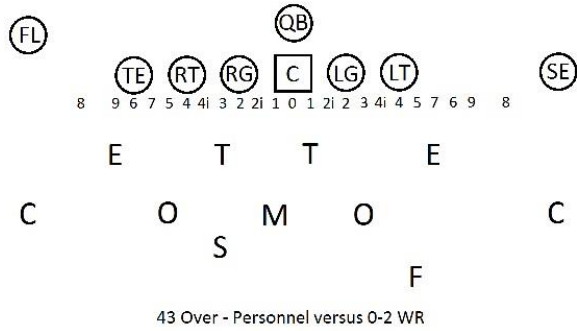
Right Defensive End (E): Lines up in the 7-technique a little further outside the left tackle's shoulder, and is responsible for the C-gap on the weak side as well as containment. This is often your best pass rusher. Your right defensive end is often one of your top defensive players.

Strong-Side Linebacker (O): Lines up in the 50-technique outside the right tackle, and is responsible for the C-gap on the strong side. He is replaced by the nickel back in nickel and dime personnel.

Middle Linebacker (M): Lines up in the 10-technique between the right guard and the center, and is responsible for the A-gap on the strong side.

Weak-Side Linebacker (O): Lines up in the 30-technique between the left guard and the left tackle, and is responsible for the B-gap on the weak side. He is replaced by the sixth defensive back in dime personnel.

Note that all the linebackers, particularly the middle linebacker, get a lot of help from the defensive line occupying linemen. They are often unblocked and can be smaller and faster than 34 linebackers.



The 43 versus the 34

One primary difference between 34 and 43 is that since defensive linemen usually rush the passer, and four defensive players are usually involved in the pass rush on a play, the 43 is more predictable in terms of where the rush is coming from. In addition, 43 linemen usually line up in a specific gap, making the rush even more exact. While the weak-side linebacker is the primary fourth rusher in a 34 defense, since the defensive linemen in a 34 are often in a two-gap alignment, it's much harder to predict how to defend against the rush.

On the other hand, 43 linemen are often more athletic, while many 34 linemen try to occupy offensive linemen to free up room for a blitzing linebacker.

In general, however, the personnel makes the front work, and there's no hard-and-fast rule that one front generates the most sacks or is best against the run or against a certain type of pass. As long as you're acquiring players who fit your chosen front, you can succeed with any of these schemes.

Your front and your personnel choices control who is on the field and their primary responsibilities in response to the offense's personnel package and the situation. Play-calling determines blitzing, pass coverage and the use of a linebacker as a spy and strong safety in run support.

The Secondary

The four remaining defenders – two cornerbacks and two safeties – are known as the secondary. In nickel personnel, a third cornerback replaces a linebacker. In the dime, a sixth defensive back replaces a second linebacker.

Cornerbacks and safeties are not specific to 34 and 43 defenses. They are defined by how well they perform in zone defenses, in man-to-man coverage and in run support.

If there's any difference, and it's a small one, it's that 34 cornerbacks tend to be a little better against the run. And the reason is purely because they play more zone defense, and cornerbacks in a short zone have to be prepared to help against the run. Cornerbacks who play mostly man-to-man defense are not expected to have strong run defending skills.

The strong safety has to be versatile. On plays when the defense is expecting the run, he plays closer to the line and provides that extra run defender. He is often asked to cover the tight end in pass coverage. And in many zone schemes, he drops back and takes a deep zone, many times handling deep coverage against a top wide receiver.

The free safety is less skilled in run defense, and is almost always covering a deep zone in pass coverage. While he isn't necessarily much smaller than a strong safety, as both have to have the speed to cover wide receivers, he may not be as strong. The free safety is replaced in the goal-line defense.

Defensive Assignments

Pass coverage is a numbers game. The basics are that you have four defensive players rushing the quarterback and seven defensive players available for pass coverage. If you add a pass rusher, that means one less pass defender. If you bring the strong safety up into run defense, that's one less pass defender.

In Front Office Football, defensive players are assigned a responsibility on each play, assuming it's a pass play. The responsibilities include:

Pass Rush: All defensive linemen, meaning the three linemen in a three-point stance in the 34 and the four linemen in a three-point stance in the 43, will rush the quarterback on pass plays. While in the NFL, defensive ends sometimes drop back in coverage (this allows them to implement a zone blitz out of the 43, as one example), in Front Office Football it would add too much complexity to game planning.

Blitzing the Quarterback: Any non-lineman rushing the passer is a blitz. In the 34, you usually have at least one linebacker blitzing – often the weak-side linebacker. In Front Office Football, you don't decide specifically who blitzes on a play, but when a blitz is called, blitzers are assigned based on their position and their skill in rushing the passer. You can "tilt" the assignment by asking it to more heavily favor skill over position, the downside being that this may make you more vulnerable to passes aimed at receivers on that side of the field.

Strong Safety at the Line: On defensive plays, and this is mandatory in a goal-line defense, and not allowed in 2-Deep, Tampa-2, 3-Deep Cloud or 4-Deep coverage, the strong safety is the "buzz" defender and sets up close to the line, giving you an eighth or ninth defender in the box.

Spy Linebacker: Against good running quarterbacks, you might want to designate a linebacker spy, who is assigned like a blitzer, but stays a couple of yards from the line – away from the linemen – and mirrors the quarterback so he can get to him quickly if he decides to scramble. Quarterbacks who like to scramble will do so much less when there's a spy watching.

Responsibilities are further divided. Cornerbacks can be in "press" coverage, meaning they try and impede receivers in the five-yard zone, or in regular coverage. And the defense, if it has someone back in a deep zone, can double-cover the opposing team's top receiver. Double coverage means one defender picks up the receiver at the line of scrimmage, bumps him and trails him while a second defender, assigned to a deep zone, brackets him and prevents him specifically from getting behind the coverage.

Due to the numbers game, only one receiver can be doubled in this manner (the cover-2, in particular, lends itself to softer de-facto double coverages on receivers running deep routes, but because there are "seams" with zones, this is not absolute).

In Front Office Football, double coverage is either on the opposing team's top receiver, as assessed by the staff, or their second-best receiver. When viewing the play in your game plan, the double-team is shown as on the X receiver, but during games that double-team will be moved to the appropriate receiver, as determined by your staff.

In addition, there is a setting on defense where you can designate that your top cornerback is always assigned to cover the opponent's top receiver, regardless of where he lines up. This is useful if you run a lot of man coverage and you have one of those "I'm an island" types on defense.

Pass Coverages

On each play, your defense uses a type of pass coverage. This is usually defined by how many defenders are committed to deep zones. Your pass coverage also defines how many players are in position to help stop the run.

Man-to-Man: In pure man-to-man defense, the five potential receivers are each covered by one defender. With four players rushing the quarterback, this leaves two unassigned defenders. This is why there are often blitzes from man-to-man defense. Against a running quarterback, you can easily assign a linebacker to spy duty.

Because there's no deep zone help, this coverage is very vulnerable to a long pass, and is rarely used outside of the red zone. However, it is a good coverage type when you're expecting a short pass, especially with unassigned linebackers, who can help out on short passes.

This is also the best defense against the run because, other than the cornerbacks, everyone is fairly close to the line and can help.

Cover-1: The free safety drops into a deep zone in the middle of the field. This leaves six defenders available for man-to-man coverage, and one of them will blitz or remain in spy duty. While this defense is also strong against short passes and runs, it can be beaten by long passes as well. But as long as the offense doesn't have two significant deep threats, it can be used all over the field. This is a good defense for frequent use against power running teams.

Press-1: This is identical to the Cover-1, except that the cornerbacks are in press coverage at the line of scrimmage, meaning that they do their best to prevent the wide receivers from running their routes. Given the numbers, there can be one unassigned linebacker in this defense providing help with short routes. Many coaches call this unassigned defender the robber.

While the Press-1 is a bit better on short passes to the outside, it is a little weaker than the Cover-1 against the run simply because the cornerbacks are already engaged with the players who will be blocking them. This is a fundamental defense for use against teams when the deep threat isn't very strong.

Tampa-2: Both safeties drop into deep zones. The middle linebacker helps deep as well, which provides support against the tight end with all those seam routes devised to break the Cover-2. It's a little bit weaker against the run because the linebackers have to be adept in zone coverage. It also struggles a bit on short passes over the middle because the middle linebacker is moving backward.

Cover-2: Both safeties drop into deep zones, which means the strong safety is unavailable for run support, but otherwise it's solid against the run because the cornerbacks and linebackers can quickly move in for run support. This is a good basic defense when the opposition has two decent wide receivers. Every receiver can receive attention on short passes, but it's difficult to blitz out of a Cover-2.

Press-2: This is a Cover-2 where the cornerbacks are in press coverage at the line of scrimmage, meaning that they do their best to prevent the wide receivers from running their routes. This means the linebackers underneath have to be more aware of receivers entering their zones – it's almost a "man under" defense. Blitzing is pretty much impossible as a result. This defense is a little weaker against the run than the standard Cover-2. While the Cover-2 is strong on short passes to the outside, the Press-2 is even stronger.

Cover-3 Sky: The free safety and two cornerbacks drop back into deep zone coverage. Other defenders play zone underneath, because otherwise someone would come open relatively easily. This coverage is very good against long passes, but can have a little trouble with throws into the flats, especially on the weak side. It's also difficult to blitz out of Cover-3. Since the strong safety is often a good run defender, Cover-3 Sky isn't bad against the inside run. But outside runs can give it some trouble as can formations with multiple receivers on one side.

Cover-3 Cloud: Both safeties along with one of the cornerbacks drop back into deep zone coverage. This is a very effective coverage against long passes. Front Office Football assumes the team will rotate the Cloud toward the best wide receiver, meaning the cornerback not in deep coverage stays with that receiver. This defense is a little more vulnerable against the run – especially runs away from the rotation. The outside linebacker away from the rotation is often exposed in his zone. It is also very weak against formations with multiple receivers on one side.

Cover-4: The safeties and cornerbacks drop back into deep zones, effectively preventing the deep ball. This leaves major holes underneath and this defense is particularly weak against the outside run. Because of all the defenders locked into deep coverage, the numbers aren't there for blitzing.

This chart shows the relative strengths and weaknesses of the basic coverages. This is not an absolute scale chart. There may be large differences between notations. The chart is provided as a guide. In general, fewer players in deep coverage means better defense against the run. More players in deep coverage means better defense against the pass.

Coverage Schemes	Man-to-Man	Cover-1	Press-1	Tampa-2	Cover-2	Press-2	Cover-3 Sky	Cover-3 Cloud	Cover-4
Inside Runs	++++	++	+	XX	o	X	+	XX	XXX
Outside Runs	++++	+++	+	o	+	X	XX	X	XXXX
Screen Passes	XX	o	++	+	++	+++	XX	X	XXX
Short Middle	o	+	++	XX	o	+	X	XX	XX
Short Outside	o	X	+	o	++	+++	XX	X	XXXX
Long Passes	XXXX	XX	XXX	+	o	X	+++	++	++++
Maximum Blitz - 43	3	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Maximum Blitz - 34	4	3	3	NA	2	1	1	1	1
Quarterback Spy	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Strong Safety Buzz	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Double-Teams	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Red Zone Use	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Strength							Multiple Receivers	Multiple Receivers	Multiple Receivers
Weakness	Outside Red Zone	Multiple Receivers	Multiple Receivers				Unbalanced Formations	Unbalanced Formations	

Play Calling

Front Office Football has a new game-planning system that research shows is close to how professional coaches approach preparing for games.

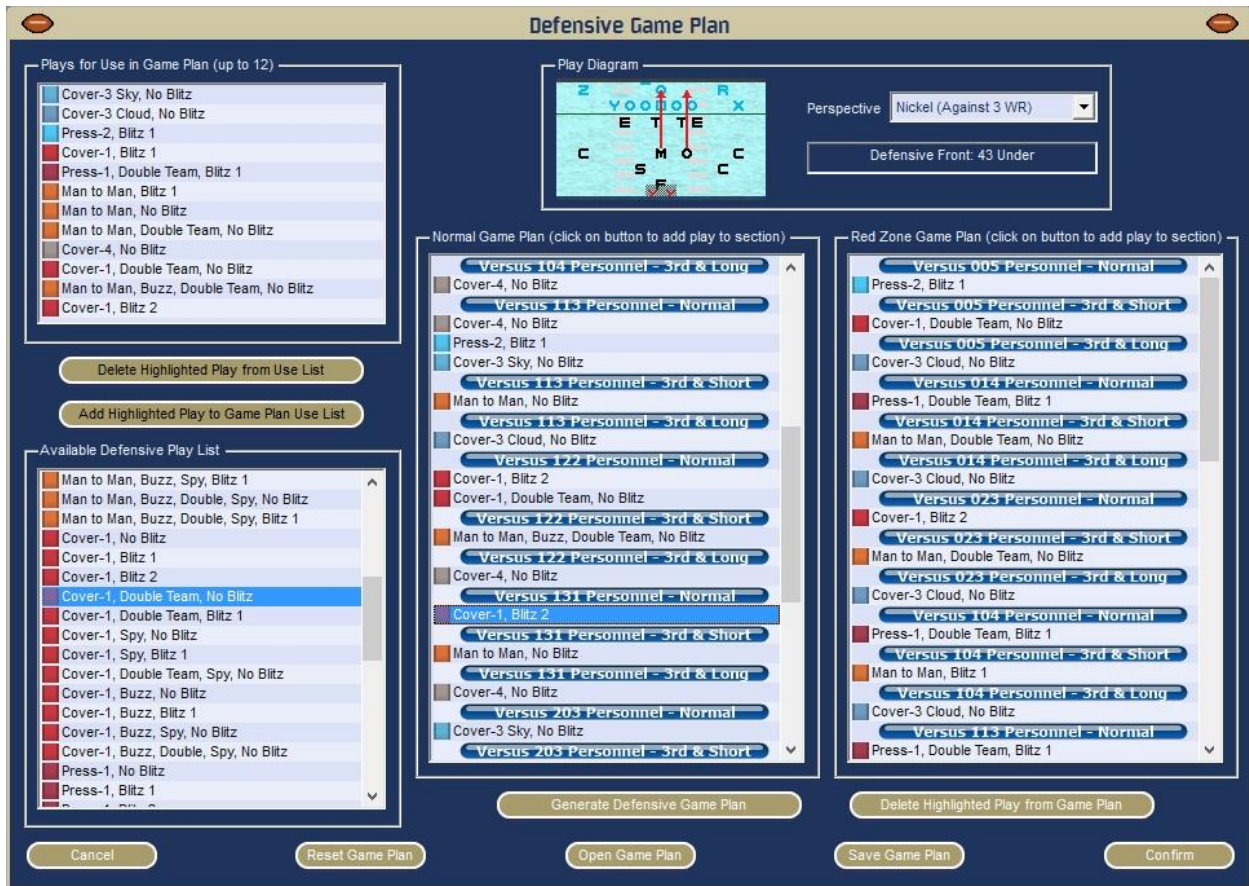
Before each game, you select up to twelve plays you will use on defense during the game. A defensive play consists of a pass coverage scheme, and the use of blitzing, a spy for a running quarterback, the use of double-teams and whether the strong safety plays close to the line in “buzz” alignment.

These choices, along with your personnel, determine what your defense expects on each play and how well it is suited to react. The specifics of each choice are defined above.

During a game, a play is automatically called for the defense based on the play-calling chart. If there is more than one play in a section, the game starts with the top selection, then continues through the section when that situation occurs later in the game. Many sections will not come up in every game.

If the situation calls for a goal-line defense (ball at the 1-yard line or a third or fourth down and one and personnel showing a run play), the game will call a goal-line defense for you. In prevent situations, you’ll have a four-deep defense on the field with dime personnel.

The idea behind this design is that defenses often have just seconds to make a play call once the offensive personnel is on the field and the down and distance clear. Without this level of advance planning, defenses would have to remain remarkably simple.



When you have selected your twelve defensive plays for the game, you assign them to specific situations. There are 64 sections, and you can assign up to 78 choices. This allows you to assign multiple plays for sections you expect to see several times in a game.

There are two lists provided. One is for the “normal” game plan and one is for defending in the red zone (inside your own 20 yard line). Each list has 32 sections. The sections are based on offensive personnel. In this case, because 113 personnel is used most frequently by just about every team in the league, the game has assigned three defensive plays for use in normal situations outside of the red zone. Most sections have just one play assigned.

You can move the highlighted play from your Plays for Use list into the game plan by double-clicking on the blue section heading. To remove a play, just highlight the entry, and hit the Delete Highlighted Play from Game Plan button.

As with all the planning screens in Front Office Football, you can generate a game plan automatically with one button-press. You can even select the twelve plays you want to use and have the game assign them to sections. Front Office Football takes your strengths and your upcoming opponent’s strengths into account when creating a game plan.