

Hurricane Defense



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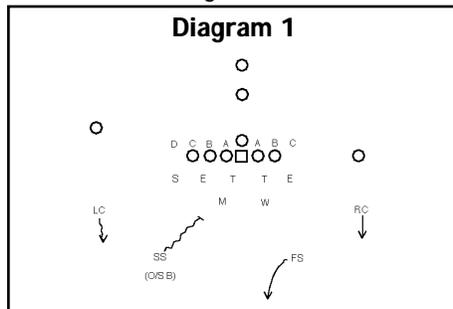
On behalf of Butch Davis and the entire defensive staff at Miami, Greg Schiano (DC), Greg Mark (DL) and Vernon Hargreaves (LB), it is an honor to contribute to the 2000 *Summer Manual*. The articles have been truly an asset to my growth as a coach and teacher. Over the years, Miami has always played great defense utilizing speed and athleticism to lead the nation in total defense on two separate occasions. When I first joined the Miami staff as a graduate assistant in 1986, our base front was a 4-3 configuration with a two-deep coverage principle. Having a defensive front seven that was so dominate, allowed us to play cover two and support the run with our corners. When I returned to Miami in 1995 with the hiring of Butch Davis, the defensive philosophy was basically the same, but how we defended the run was probably the biggest aspect of the defensive scheme to change. Our overall defensive philosophy is as follows:

- Stop the run.
- Win third down.
- Create turnovers.

As you can see, like most people today, stopping the run is our first and foremost goal. In order to attain our second goal of winning third down (hold opponents to 31 percent success), we have to play great run defense on first and second down, and force our opponents into third and long situations. The way we are going to do this is to implement our safety into the run front. We can do this by a pre-determined call or by offensive sets and formations. Our base call is Eagle Three Exchange.

Eagle Three Exchange

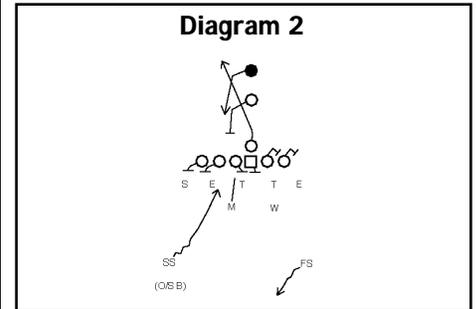
Eagle Three Exchange is a pre-determined front and coverage, which implements our strong safety as the eighth defender in our force unit. We like to play zone behind this call to take the pressure off of our Sam linebacker. You can play a man free coverage scheme that would



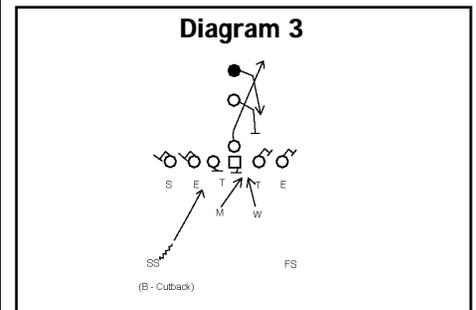
put the Sam linebacker man on man with the tight end. This becomes a difficult task to ask him to contain strong-side runs and cover the tight end, man for man.

Pre-snap: Secondary should give the quarterback a two-deep shell look and rotate to coverage on snap or just prior to snap. Try to disguise as long as possible.

Run Responsibility: The strong safety is responsible for the outside portion of the B-gap. We say outside B because the Mike linebacker will force all strong-side runs in the B-gap to the strong safety. Example, defending the isolation play.



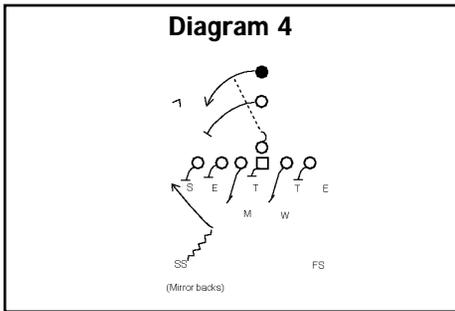
As you can see, the Mike will take on the fullback and spill the ball out to the strong safety. We have our strong safety key the backs for his gap fit. If the ball declares weak, then the strong safety is responsible for cutback B-gap and the Mike can run with weakside flow.



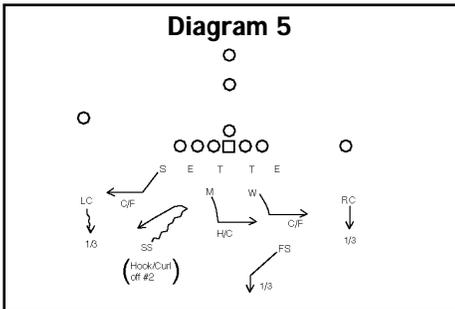
If the ball goes outside the tackle box, then the strong safety will secure his gap then adjust his pursuit angle with the ball. In order to master their keys and gap fits, we will send our safeties to inside run drill on a daily basis. It is a "live" drill to the point of attack with no tackling. Obviously, without wide receivers in the drill to block support, we will have the safeties tag off on the runningbacks.

With both backs outside, the strong safety can adjust his pursuit angle outside.

Pass Responsibility: The strong safety is responsible for the strong-side curl. Base cover three would put the strong safety in the flat and the Sam linebacker in the strong-side curl. However,



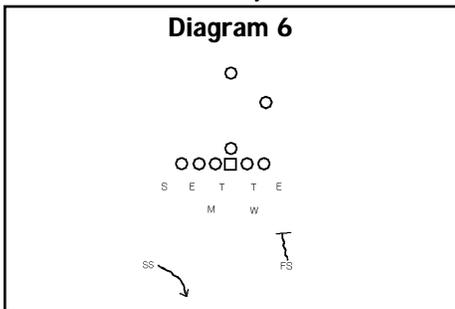
with B-gap responsibility versus the run, it would be virtually impossible for strong safety to cover the flat. Exchange is the term which tells the strong safety and the Sam linebacker to switch pass responsibility. On pass key, the strong safety will drop off of No. 2 strong.



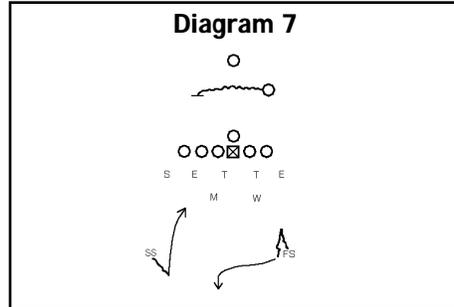
As mentioned before, disguise is very important. If the offense senses that the strong safety is falling in to create an eight-man front, then they will simply check-off and force you to defend the three-step pass game. As you can see, the weakness of this front and cover is the flat.

The other way we will deploy the safety to the run front is by backfield set. For example, if the offense has strong run tendencies based on backfield sets, then we will insert the safety where they are most likely to run. Computer analysis is very helpful in determining whether to call the front or align according to formations and backfield sets.

With a weakside tilt, the free safety will now fall into the force unit and be responsible for the outside portion of the A-gap. All weakside runs will be forced outside to the safety. If the offense



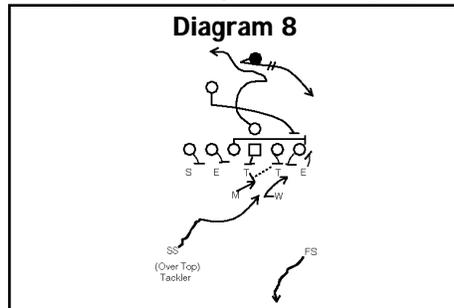
decides to move the fullback and create a strong-side tilt, then the safeties will seesaw and switch responsibilities.



Make sure that your middle third defender does not get caught short when switching from a run defender to a pass defender.

Defending Misdirection Runs

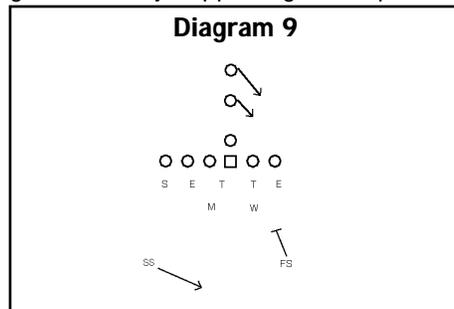
Play recognition is vital when defending backfield sets with the eighth man. Most offenses will give you strong-side tilt, then run weakside. It is important that the safety key the backs and insert according to play direction and design. Example, defending the counter play.



As you can see from the illustration, its vital that the strong safety recognize the misdirection and mirror the backs and end up weakside as the tackler.

Because most defenses load up and defend sets and formations, offenses are now running most of their plays out of the I-formation and not giving the defense any pre-snap keys. If this is the case, then we will "key" the backs and fall the safety in based on flow.

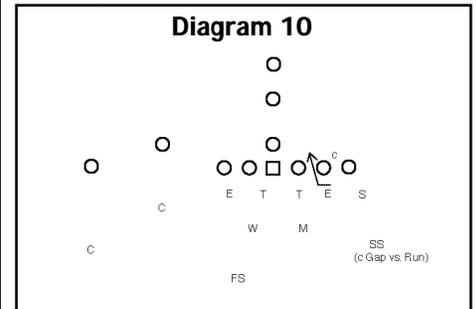
The advantage of "key" is you usually get the safety supporting at the point of



attack. The one disadvantage is you have no pre-determined middle third defender.

Defending the Slot Set

Versus a slot set, we will play Eagle Strong Cover 3 and put the end in the B-gap, so that the strong safety can support the run one gap wider and still cover the deep outside third.



We will align the strong safety at a depth of eight yards so he can key through the tight end to the backs and still get down to cover his gap versus the run. It is extremely important that he sees the tight end for a run-pass key. We talk about a "High Hat" versus "Low Hat key." Typically, when the tight end releases for a pass, he will tend to be much higher than coming off the ball to block for the run game. Everything in the run game is turned back to the strong safety, which allows both corners and the free safety to defend the pass first.

We allowed just over 100 yards rushing per game last season. Our ability to play the eight-man front and still be sound versus the pass had a lot to do with our success.

In a standard pro-set with two backs, there are seven gaps at the line of scrimmage to defend, and as soon as the offense inserts the fullback into the blocking scheme, they have essentially created another gap for the defense to defend. That is why at the University of Miami, we have committed ourselves to the eight man front and will continue to develop defensive schemes to involve our safeties in the support structure of our defense.

Keep football a safe game with concentrated efforts toward proper techniques.