

Offensive Line Technique

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I could not be more excited to be here in Minnesota, and appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about this game we are all so passionate about. I've had the chance to coach at many different institutions across the country, and I've quickly realized that the University of Minnesota, and the state of Minnesota in general, is a special place. I believe that together we will continue to grow the game in Minnesota and build an elite culture of football at all levels of the game. If I can ever help with any of you, please do not hesitate to reach out. Our facility is always open to you and our staff is always available.

While not always the most glamorous element of the game, I'm passionate about working with the offensive line to establish the most important part of the offensive game. Without strong line play, all of the other areas of the team cannot function properly, whether it be running or passing schemes. If you don't have a strong line then you don't have a strong offense. In terms of positions, the offensive line is as sophisticated as they come in our sport. It takes five individuals working as one to resist the opposition and move the ball down the field. If one individual does not do their job then it can cause the entire line to malfunction for a play or a series. Chemistry and cohesion are critical to dominant offensive line play.

I've had the chance to work with all facets of the offense during my career, and truly believe the importance of good fundamentals in line play cannot be overstated. I am going to expound on some of those fundamentals, which can be practiced daily, that I believe are key to a team's success.

Pad Level and Power Walking

In order to win at the line of scrimmage, you need to block somebody and move a man against his will. You have to have tremendous technique, but also have to have a desire to dominate your opponent. One thing that is critical is pad level. By that, I mean that your pads have to be underneath your opponent's pads because you are trying to get physical leverage. When I talk about pad level, I am referring to the level of your shoulder pads and your eyes. To have the necessary pad level you have to bend your ankles, knees, and hips and you

have to keep your chest up. Your base has to be firm because you move with that base. I call moving through that base with power walking. In other words, simulate pushing a wheelbarrow loaded with 200 pounds or trying to push a car that is in neutral. To do that you have to bend and push, but maintain good body posture. That power of your feet goes into the ground and you drive with your hips and lower-body strength. That's what I mean by power walking.

"Pound The Ground"

When I say "pound the ground," to our linemen, it means focusing on your feet. It's important to drive your feet into the ground so you have great traction. Because if you don't have good traction you can't push a 300-pound opponent. You have to get all of your cleats in the ground. It's critical for your base, balance and posture. When you have your cleats on the ground, your weight should be on the inside of your feet and that allows you to power walk and have low pad level. That bend we talked about earlier in your ankles knees and hips, helps create that critical reverse arch in the back, which is where your power comes from.

"Violent Striking" and "The Difference"

On the football field, we want our lineman to use their hands to effectively strike their defensive counterpart. Where they strike is critical because it has a lot to do with their ability to control their opponent. With that in mind, we want them to strike on the chest plate. They should have their thumbs up and slide their hands into a position where their thumbs are on their opponent's chest plate and lower pectoral muscles. Their thumbs should be above their fingers and their elbows should be tight. That is the kind of violent strike we want, because it is really a race to see who can get their hands inside first. If a defender gets their hands inside first then they are able to manipulate where the offensive lineman can put their hands and can then eliminate that lineman and turn a potential gain into a wasted snap. But if our lineman get their hands inside first, then the defensive player's hands are on the outside and he can't move our lineman. Having your hands inside allow you to control the man and move him. It's all about control and

movement. If you can do that then you are helping your offense.

How do you win the battle at the line? As mentioned earlier, it all depends on how quickly you strike and getting your hands in the right place. We work on that a lot, as it is a race to see who can do that first. Once the ball snaps, who can get to their first? We call that the difference. By that, we mean it is the difference between winning and losing a block. How quickly you can get out of your stance and get your hands into that perfect fit position.

“Aiming Point”

One of the most important things that I teach in run blocking is, what is my aiming point to contact the defender? Do I want to contact him with my eyes and hands right down the middle, outside number, inside number, outside armpit, inside armpit? Where do I want to strike and then what is the footwork I am going to use to get there? My coaching is based on what is my aiming point and how do I get the first two steps in the ground correctly to get started on that aiming point. If you can get the first two steps in the ground quickly then you can get to your aiming point and you can get your hands in the fit position first. This gives you a great chance of winning. After that, the battle between winning and losing comes down to physical strain, toughness and want to. How bad do you want to beat your opponent? How bad do you want that extra yard, which can be the difference between winning and losing? I continually stress first step, second step, strike to the fit position, where is my aiming point and where do I want my eyes to our players.

“S.P.A.R.”

Pass protection is obviously different because pass protection is getting out of your stance to the perfect posture that you want to be in to protect. Pass protection to me is summarized in this word, SPAR. Sparring is a term used in boxing when two guys in hand-to-hand combat. That is really what pass protection is. Our lineman is trying to keep his opponent moving around between him and the quarterback. He is continually trying to stay between him and the quarterback. I translate sparring into:

Stance to set. P is posture and punch. A player's posture is totally different in pass protection compared to run blocking. Instead of calling it strike, which we do while talking about run protection, we call it punch. How does a player keep the defender away in pass protection? Space is your friend when you are pass protecting. A is arms in bars. If you can create space then you want to get your arms locked out. And the last part is React and Respond. How you react and respond to your opposition will go a long way into a successful block and therefore a successful snap.

That's a quick way that I describe pass protection. You work on drills that go stance to set followed by working on establishing perfect posture and then your punch. Then you work on arms in bars and then you react and respond. Where is your opponent going and how do you respond to his movements? How do you respond if he knocks your hand down or how do you respond if he spins? That's how I teach pass protection. A few drills can help pull it together. We are constantly working on perfecting our stance to set. Then we use medicine balls to practice our punches. Several years ago I got the idea to use those pop-up bags for the offensive line as well. You typically see the defense use them in practice, but they are great for line play as well. You can hit one and it comes right back up, so you can hit it again. It helps a player work on how they react and respond.

Thank you again for allowing me to share a few thoughts on offensive line play with you. I feel it's the most critical position on the field. Again, if I can ever be of service to you, please don't hesitate to reach out. ■