

# HEADSETS



WRITTEN FOR COACHES BY COACHES

VOLUME 4: ISSUE 5

*introducing the*  
**23 DEFENSE**

**CREATING**  
**OFF-SEASON VIDEOS**  
**FOR YOUR KIDS**

**REACH WITH**  
**CONFIDENCE**



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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\**

# TIME TO RAISE THE BAR



JAMESIMPSONDESIGNS  
**SPORTS GRAPHIC DESIGN**



# JOB SEARCH PREP FOR COACHES

## MASTERING THE ART OF FOLLOW-UP: NAVIGATING THE JOB APPLICATION PROCESS



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In the competitive world of coaching, the application process is just the first step on the path to securing your dream position. Once you've submitted your application for a coaching position and await the decision, the art of follow-up becomes a crucial element in setting yourself apart from the competition. Whether you're eyeing an assistant coaching role or vying for the head coach position, taking proactive steps to connect with the search director can make a significant difference. Landing an interview can often be a difficult process, and we never really know exactly what a search director/committee may be looking for in candidates. So the follow up process is extremely important in at least letting them know how interested you are in that position.

Here's a comprehensive guide for sport coaches on how to navigate the follow-up process with finesse.

**1. Timing is Everything:** After submitting

your application, resist the urge to inundate the search director with immediate follow-ups. Allow some time for them to review applications and shortlist candidates. Typically, a follow-up email or call after a week is appropriate, expressing your continued interest in the position and seeking an update on the timeline for the selection process.

**2. Craft a Polished Follow-Up Email:** When crafting your follow-up email, strike a balance between enthusiasm and professionalism. Begin by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to apply and reiterating your interest in the position. Concisely highlight your key qualifications and how they align with the needs of the team or organization. Politely inquire about the status of your application and express your eagerness to contribute to the program. Most of all, keep the email BRIEF!

**3. Showcase Continued Interest:** Use the follow-up as an opportunity to demonstrate your ongoing commitment to the position. Briefly discuss any recent accomplishments or developments in your coaching career that further reinforce your suitability for the role. Emphasize your dedication to the team's success and your enthusiasm for the coaching philosophy embraced by the organization.

**4. Be Professional and Respectful:** Maintain a professional tone in all communications, emphasizing your understanding of the demanding nature of the selection process. Respect the time constraints of the search director and avoid coming across as overly

persistent. If the provided timeline for updates has not passed, express your patience while eagerly anticipating any forthcoming information.

**5. Leverage Personal Connections:** If you have any personal or professional connections within the organization, consider reaching out to them for insights. A recommendation or endorsement from someone within the sports program can carry significant weight and further emphasize your candidacy.

**6. Prepare for Possible Outcomes:** While optimism is essential, it's prudent to be prepared for various outcomes. Whether you receive a positive response, a request for additional information, or even a rejection, respond with grace and gratitude. Maintain a positive relationship with the search director and express your interest in future opportunities.

**Conclusion:** The follow-up process is a delicate dance in the intricate world of coaching applications. It requires a blend of persistence, professionalism, and strategic communication. By mastering the art of follow-up, you not only stay on the radar of the search director but also demonstrate the qualities of dedication and proactive communication that are highly valued in the coaching arena. Remember, in the competitive profession of coaching, sometimes the most memorable moves happen off the field/court.

### 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!

1. Timing is everything

2. Craft a polished follow-up email

3. Showcase continued interest

4. Be professional and respectful

5. Leverage personal connections

6. Prepare for possible outcomes

# ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT

## INTRODUCING THE 23 DEFENSE



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### *The Influence of Football Legends*

Over the years, I've had the privilege of learning from

some of the greatest defensive minds in football history. The 23 Defense is the result of extensive study and adaptation of strategies employed by legends such as Buddy Ryan, Nick Saban, Bill Belichick, Mike Zimmer and Jim Johnson. Each of these coaches contributed vital elements that have culminated in a defense designed to dominate opponents, minimize big plays, and maximize turnovers.

### **Inspirations and Foundations**

#### *Buddy Ryan's Aggressiveness and Innovative Alignment*

Buddy Ryan's 46 Defense was known for its aggressiveness and the deployment of two outside linebackers on the same side of the defense. This principle is central to the 23 Defense. By overloading one side with linebackers, we can create confusion and pressure on the offense, forcing them to make quick decisions and often mistakes.

#### *Nick Saban's Coverage Principles*

Nick Saban's defensive schemes are renowned

for their effectiveness, particularly in pass coverage. We adopted Saban's philosophy of leveraging vertical and horizontal coverage rules, ensuring our defensive backs always have the upper hand. In the 23 Defense, we incorporate Saban's two-high safety look, which disguises our intentions and makes it difficult for quarterbacks to read our coverage disrupting their timing.

#### *Bill Belichick's Interior and Coverage Principles*

Bill Belichick's ability to adapt his defense to exploit the weaknesses of the opposition is legendary. In the 23 Defense, we employ Belichick's principles of interior defense and coverage, ensuring that we are always defending the middle of the field first. By focusing on stopping the run inside and forcing passes short or to the outside, we reduce the chances of big plays against us.

#### *Mike Zimmer's Blitz Peel*

This involves sending blitzers from various angles while peeling off into coverage as needed. In our defense, the Blitz Peel is a cornerstone tactic. This unpredictability keeps offenses on their toes and allows us to create pressure without sacrificing coverage integrity.

#### *Jim Johnson's Double A-Gap Pressure*

Jim Johnson's Double A-Gap blitz pressure is another critical element. By bringing pressure up the middle, we disturb the quarterback's comfort zone, forcing hurried and errant throws. This tactic not only increases our chances of creating turnovers opportunities but also demoralizes the opposing offense by consistently collapsing the pocket.

*continued on next page*

### **Pre Snap**

We begin with a two-high safety shell, featuring a free safety and a strong safety. The rover, always positioned in the right apex, provides additional support in the box. This setup not only adds another layer of protection against deep passes but also allows us to disguise our intentions and keep the offense guessing. Our formation includes three defensive linemen, three linebackers, two strong safeties, one free safety, and two cornerbacks.

### **Two Gap Responsibility for Defensive Linemen**

Our defensive linemen are responsible for two gaps, allowing them to control the line of scrimmage and make it difficult for the offense to find running lanes. This approach, combined with our aggressive blitzes, puts immense pressure on the offensive line and forces mistakes that we can capitalize on.

### **Strategic Innovation**

Our defensive philosophy is rooted in adaptability and efficiency. With a versatile lineup and strategic play-calling, we can

seamlessly adjust to any situation—whether facing a run-heavy offense, a high-powered passing attack, or a no-huddle tempo. We keep opposing offenses off-balance and capitalize on every opportunity to gain the advantage by employing a mix of movement and blitzes. Depending on the offensive formation, we have the flexibility to employ 9-11 man boxes, allowing us to generate immense pressure on the offense.

### **Final Thoughts**

From the first day of practice, we emphasize the importance of defending the inside, stopping the run, and playing with relentless effort. A daily tackling circuit is non-negotiable for our players. Gang tackling, proper pursuit angles, and overall team cohesion are drilled into our players day in and day out, ensuring that they are prepared to execute with precision when it matters most. The 23 Defense is not just a system; it's a mindset. It's about imposing our will on the opposition, dictating the flow of the game, and emerging victorious. It's a tribute to the legendary coaches who paved the way for us and an embodiment of the relentless pursuit of perfection.





# DRILLS

## CREATE OFF-SEASON INSTALL VIDEOS FOR YOUR PLAYERS



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First, you'll want to invest in audio equipment. While it may seem expensive, you can find some good pieces of audio for \$30-\$45 on Amazon.

Next, position your camera or webcam toward a whiteboard. This will allow you to capture all of your drawings.

Once you save the files, organize them into folders and upload them directly to Hudl or even a Google Classroom.

This way, you can see which players have viewed the curriculum and which players haven't.

We have included a step-by-step guide in our new vIQtory Pro community, which walks you through how to use Google Classroom and Hudl to upload these videos.

We also have all of our position courses, coordinator courses, drills, play breakdowns, templates, and more within our community.

[Join vIQtory Pro for free here.](#)

As always, if you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me directly on Twitter, I'm happy to help!

Football is one of the few sports where most coaches have limited contact with players. We're expected, as coaches, to teach scheme, tackling, and technique all within 3 weeks before our first game.

To get a jump on teaching players, coaches have started to turn toward technology to help.

One of our favorite tools is recording your entire playbook and putting it on Hudl. If you're a team allowed to have spring ball, this could also be a spring ball install guide.

How do you do this?



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# DRILLS

## LEFT TACKLE: THE BLIND SIDE PROTECTOR



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In November of 2009, the movie, *The Blindside* opens with a scene of an actual NFL game and the career ending injury of Joe Theismann by defensive rushers Lawrence Taylor and Harry Carson. I am of the age that I can remember Lawrence Taylor causing havoc on the field for many QBs. Recently the NFL draft showed us again the premium of offensive linemen with 7 first rounds picks being offensive tackles and one other offensive lineman being picked in the first 32.

New LA Chargers head coach, Jim Harbaugh when asked why he drafted an offensive tackle at the 5th spot was quoted as saying "Offensive linemen, we look at as weapons. That group, when we talk about attacking on offense, the offensive line is the tip of the spear." (Florio, 2024).

This reminds us all of the value of the left tackle, often referred to as protecting the blindside. This is true if the team has a right-handed QB, when the QB drops to pass he is less likely to see a pass rusher coming from his left. Left tackles

in the NFL are often one of the highest paid players on the team behind quarterbacks.

What makes a good blindside protector? First, size matters. The LT is usually one of the biggest linemen on the team and has good arm length. This helps him to get his hands on the speedy outside edge rushers he is responsible for. He must be strong to be able to stop or reroute the rusher. The left tackle needs to be athletic and be able to move laterally to get to the edge rusher to keep his QB clean and upright. He should have a high football IQ to be able to understand the defense and what they are trying to do to get to the QB.

In the early 2000s Dwight Freeney was a sack machine. I can recall a game in the 2004, when the Indianapolis Colts were facing the Baltimore Ravens. The Ravens Left Tackle was a first-ballot Hall of Famer, Jonathon Ogden. Freeney used his patented spin move on Ogden and beat him for two sacks that game. The next season when they played, Ogden was mentally beat by Freeney, Freeney won the head game in that contest. This highlights the mental strength and IQ a left tackle must have.

The technical skills of all linemen are what make them great. Left tackles are no different. They still have to run block, pull, double team and get to the second level. What separates the left tackle is his pass blocking. If you have two good tackles, and one is slightly better in pass blocking, he should be the left tackle to protect the blindside.

To train the left tackle, he should be good with his footwork. The body control and balance to take on the quicker pass rushers is essential. He must be strong and work hard in the weight room. He should be a good communicator as he will need to relay to the running back or TE if they need to double team a rusher or pick up a blitz.

In practice the left tackle should work on his stance and kick step for pass blocking. He needs to work on his drive block and down blocks for the run game. In today's game with many teams using read options and RPOs the left tackle may have to block up field against linebackers, so second level run blocking and moving in space is important.

The left tackle must be able to critique himself and analyze his play. He should be able to recognize defense and blitzes, so time in the film room is part of his regular training. He should know the playbook and protection schemes as well or better than anyone else in the front five. Drills for the left tackle should include drive blocking for the run game. The left tackle should work on one-on-one drills for pass blocking. He should go against different rushers who have a variety of moves to be prepared for different techniques in the games.

During team drills he should be working on opponent recognition and blitz pickup. He should be shown a multitude of looks to practice different techniques in the pass protection. The left tackle should have all the runs plays to his side run in team so he can be prepared for the

different techniques he will be using the game to attack the front seven of the defense.

To prepare him mentally for his time against the Freeney's he might face he should prepare mentally. He should use visualization techniques and mindfulness to help him bounce back if he's beaten. Having a good game plan will help him prepare to this as well.

The blindside protector will face ridicule if he makes a mistake, so he should be mentally tough and prepared physically. No team wants to see the QB get sacked, or the RB lose yards. A formidable left tackle can make a team look great, and yet he will receive little praise from the common fan.

### References

Florio, M. (2024, April 26). *Jim Harbaugh defends decision to take tackle Joe Alt*. Retrieved from *Pro Football Talk*: <https://www.nbcsports.com/nfl/profootballtalk/rumor-mill/news/jim-harbaugh-defends-decision-to-take-tackle-joe-alt>



# TRENCH TRAINING

REACH WITH CONFIDENCE



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For offensive linemen, learning to execute the reach block effectively requires the most amount of trust. I say this because even in training sessions when there is no back present or official play to be run, there is a hesitation to fully commit to the block. If there's hesitation in that setting, there's bound to be performance gaps on the field. In this article, I hope to give a few key points that can be easily applied to teaching the reach block at the youth and high school level.

## Paint the picture

There are a variety of ways that teams look to get the ball outside in the run game. But the timing of the play could be wildly different. The jet sweep from under center, hits at a much different speed than outside zone from the pistol, and completely different from rocket toss from the flexbone. To help the line play faster, you need to clearly explain the tempo of the play and how long linemen are expected to sustain their block. To take it a step further, when the play is being installed, have the line turn around and watch how the play is being executed behind them. That will give them the best perspective possible. Additionally, not all outside run plays are designed to get to the sideline. Linemen need to be aware of whether the back is trying

to outrun people or looking to find a vertical cut. That will set them up for success pre-snap.

## Marry the footwork

Just this past weekend, I had the opportunity to talk to former Trench Training instructor, and Indianapolis Colts rookie center, Tanor Bortolini. I was asking about his combine training experience, and he shared how his instructor suggested that the line footwork should match up with the footwork of the running back. Often the line will want to step totally lateral and shuffle to achieve a reach block. It looks nothing like what the back is doing to get to the same place. The line is going to have to take a wide enough step, sometimes losing ground, to capture playside leverage. In the same way the back isn't shuffling or staying square, the line is going to have to believe that opening their playside shoulder will be an advantage.

## Where is the help coming from?

The last thing you can do to build confidence is make it crystal clear whether each player has help on their reach block and where it is coming from. For a play like the jet sweep from under center in the Wing-T, the tackle usually doesn't have any help because the play side guard is pulling. The tackle has to attack that block, knowing that they have to win on their own. For a play like outside zone, the help will be determined by the alignment rules. If the guard is uncovered, the tackle knows that he has help coming from the inside, but none to the outside. The tackle can take an aggressive reach step knowing that he's protected against an inside move.

On the back side, from the center on back, the players need to be told that their block is based on keeping the backside players in the backside gap. That means that as long as the defender doesn't attack their playside gap, they can turn it loose. A lot of players on the backside get worried about needing to latch onto a block rather than continue to work their path to the playside. They need to be told that their "help" is really just making the defender play behind them, even if they don't collision them or latch on.

Stretching a team horizontally in the run game creates an incredible advantage for you as an offense. Making sure the line can play with the same speed as the backs on those outside plays, will make your offense even more dynamic! For more video tutorials and coaching points on reach blocks, check out our Trench Training Offensive Line Coaches Academy at the following link: <https://pages.trenchtraining.com/oline-academy>

# LEADERSHIP

## KNOW



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This article is the 5th installment in a 6 article series. In previous writings we covered the evolution of leadership through the lens of the U.S. Army, from antiquated to modern terms, but have also seen that the principles and concepts are quite similar. In the last volume, we covered the "Be" portion of the Be, Know, Do army leadership model. In short, the be model is all about your internal character and external appearance. You have to "Be" a leader all the time to be a leader when it matters. In this article, we are going to discuss the "Know" pillar of the model.

### Know

This is the smallest pillar by outline on the surface (you can see it's only 1/6th of the circle on the model) but can quickly become the largest by quantity of contents, as it is all about your knowledge and skill sets, aka your intellect. Your leadership influence can absolutely be defined by the amount of knowledge you have. You can be the best person in the world, caring, kind, empathetic... but if you can't think your way out of a brown paper sack people will not follow

you. The old saying goes, "no one cares what you know, until they know that you care." I think this is a false statement. From my observations, and that of other coaches in my circle, the new version of the saying should read, "no one cares that you care, until they know that you know." People will not allow themselves to be "led" by people who can't help them. This may never be truer than on the football field.

### Intellect

Your intellect can be broken down into smaller categories for you to evaluate and develop. The key pieces consist of:

#### Mental agility

Your mental agility is your ability to think/problem solve on the fly. It can be identified in ability to think outside the box, think around corners, or ability to manage complex problems. This is one of my top priorities in measuring someone's competency and Intellect. Life, especially in football, is a 4D environment. You can't only look at one problem at a time. You have to be able to handle complexity.

#### Sound Judgment

Judgment is the word you'll find on the model below, but what a true leader does is make sound decisions, not just quick decisions. So, I've even raised the standard from the army model. Coaching is full of situations which require you to make decisions. Who will be your starting QB, should you deal with a fuming parent right now or after some cooling off time, how many plays should you put in your playbook this week. All

of these are situations that require you to have knowledge of yourself and your environment. If you do not show this quality, you may soon find yourself suffering consequences of your own actions.

### Innovation

An innovative leader can generally see the battlefield (or practice field) in small sections and be able to "create" solutions with what they have available. In coaching this certainly shows up during games, when your gameplan isn't working as expected. You can't install a full new game plan at halftime, you can pull a D1 player out of the stands and answer your problems with more talent, but you can find new ways to solve a problem within your scheme. I can't help but think of the first time I saw the Power play blocked with a Tackle pulling instead of a Guard. The defense was playing a Tite Front 3-4 with 4i's, and the Tackle just couldn't dig the Defensive End out. The Coach created an answer to the problem by simply having the Guard down block the 4i and letting the Tackle pull to wrap. That coach was innovative. Remember, "leadership is solving problems."

### Interpersonal Tact

Listen, as a leader we all have to know our deficiencies. Interpersonal tact, or the ability to speak to, work with, and listen to those around you is one of the hardest skills to self-identify as being weak at. We often don't see what other people are struggling with, what they don't comprehend, how they receive our words, when our confidence turns to arrogance... this list goes on. This is a great place to find a

mentor, a buddy, a coworker, someone to give you assessments of how your interactions are being perceived from the outside. If you can master interpersonal tact, you can get people to run through a wall for you. If you are constantly talking down to people, you may find yourself alone in a room trying to do everything.

### Expertise

The final piece in the "Know" pillar is expertise. It's exactly what it sounds like. Being an expert in your craft. This can be seen as the final culmination of all of the other pieces. The expert knows all of the ins and outs, the nooks and crannies, the "secret sauce" of how to make their craft the best. Expertise is gained by constant study in your realm, whether that's the military or football.

In conclusion, the "know" pillar of Be, Know, Do is all about what you know. It is the glue that ties your physical being with your actions. A sculpture can't act, but looks great. An encyclopedia has all the knowledge but doesn't look the part. You have to be well rounded in all three aspects to be a great leader.



# COACH LIKE A TEACHER AND TEACH LIKE A COACH

## FIRE



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[MATERIALS](#)

I was a Catholic altar boy growing up. My parents were traditional Irish- Americans and, as such, their children were obligated to assist in mass on Sunday. I wasn't particularly good at it. There were lots of forgotten chores and early morning wandering of the mind. This typically resulted in an uncomfortable conversation with the priest, where I was informed that I had screwed up. Although I was not good at it, and my performance justified a good scolding, I look back on that experience fondly. There were lots of things about Catholic mass that I appreciated even as a twelve year old boy. One of them was the use of fire. By "fire" I mean the candles and the burning of incense. Even today, as a lapsed Catholic, I still remember the long shadows and sweet, smokey smells that alerted my subconscious that this was a serious place where serious things happened.

Fire has long played a significant role in every culture and their ceremonies. As one of the building blocks of civilization this should not be a surprise. However, sociologist Mark Cooper argues that the use of fire in cultural ceremonies causes groups to bond. He believes that fire is viewed as a symbol of divinity. Because of this, the incorporation of fire into ceremonies causes participants to align themselves with the group because the group becomes an incarnation of divine, life giving, fire. In other words, if you can incorporate fire into your team or classroom, you will trigger a natural attraction in your kids' brain. Religions, the Olympics, and even the producers of Survivor knew this.

Although you may not be giving away a million dollars for being the last person standing, you can use fire to get kids and adults to buy into your program.

In our football program we use fire in two important ceremonies. First, we start off the season with a team bonfire. This is typically held at my house and the fire is for players and staff only. When we are talking with the kids, my wife is talking with parents about fundraising, chain crews, and other volunteer issues that I hate. When the team meets at the bonfire we talk about the "why". That means "Why do we play football?" If you are a football coach reading this you can skip ahead. For everyone else, football is not easy. The practices are not fun. It is not like soccer, baseball, or hockey (with all do respect to those sports). In football not everyone gets to touch the ball. In fact, most players never get to touch the ball or score. Football is to sports, what

being an industrial worker is to the workforce. It is hard, dirty, and brutal. That is one of the things that I love about it and so do many kids. When we gather around the bon-fire we talk about that and why we are willing to endure this grind. We talk about the "why" and in the words of my friend, Coach Rick Stewart, "The why must make you cry." We have had kids talk about brotherhood, a sense of belonging, and love of the visceral nature of football. However, we have also had kids disclose that football has helped them cope with substance abuse, family dysfunction, and even suicidal thoughts. All of this is shared while the group stares into the fire. Someone once told me that the best time to talk to your kid is while driving, as neither of you have to make eye contact. Maybe the bon-fire serves the same purpose.



"The why must make you cry."

Our second fire related ceremony is the Candle Ceremony. I use this with both the football team and my at-risk students. In the Candle Ceremony a graduating player, or student,

**"Fire has the ability to make your meeting or function take on a far more serious tone that appeals to your participants' brains. Fire causes people to take words seriously and believe that they are part of something bigger than themselves."**

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passes a candle to a younger peer. The candle was passed to the graduating student the year before by another student. When they receive the candle they write on it their name and a word that represents them. When they pass the candle on, they have to explain why they chose their recipient and how they hope they won't "let the candle go out." We usually set up this ceremony in a darkened room and the atmosphere never fails to become dramatic. All participant's eyes are glued to the solitary figure, speaking in the shadow of their candle. You can feel the anticipation as to who will be chosen as worthy of receiving the candle. It takes on a similar feel to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve at St. Ann's. This year, after performing the Candle Ceremony in my classroom, one of the recipients muttered, "Great. Now I guess I have to come back."



"Don't let the candle die."

Fire has the ability to make your meeting or function take on a far more serious tone that appeals to your participants' brains. Fire causes people to take words seriously and believe that they are part of something bigger than themselves. When we did the first Candle Ceremony, my daughter's boyfriend was watching from inside of the house. When he saw the team in a circle around the bon-fire and the candles being passed around, he commented to my daughter, "Wow. This is some serious stuff."

With the impact that a good teacher or coach can make on a young person's life, it should be serious stuff.



Next year, we will also burn incense.



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