

Michael Schroeder: Overview of the 4-3 Defense

Introduction

Michael Schroeder is the Linebackers coach at Mt. San Jacinto College.

Reasons to Run the 4-3 Defense

- Diverse front, can easily adjust to modern offenses
- Zone Reads and other new innovations require you to adapt quickly

Personnel

Corners - Most confident athletes on the field, must be fast as well - but they cannot be afraid of the challenge.

Safeties - Game changers, leaders on the field, intelligent, but can run and hit. Fast, undersized LBs.

Ends - Oversized OLBs. Speed, ability to change direction are vital - they must be able to contain a speedy QB. We are in big trouble if the ends lose contain.

Tackles - Can't run this defense when one of your Tackles needs to be hidden. Need 2 Tackles that can demand double teams every play, allowing the LBs to plug & scrape. These are gap control players.

Mike Backer - Bigger player, a plugger. He has to take on the iso, play B gap to B gap very physically.

Sam Backer - Best tackler on the field, but with the size to fill the C-Gap.

Will Backer - Safety-hybrid type player, but has the ability to fill weak B-Gap; also has to be able to cover in man. Quickest Linebacker.

Philosophy

- Stop the run game
- Never give up the big play
- Pressure the pass
- Get the mindset to repossess the ball
- *Takeovers are a mentality issue, and you must instill that mentality!*

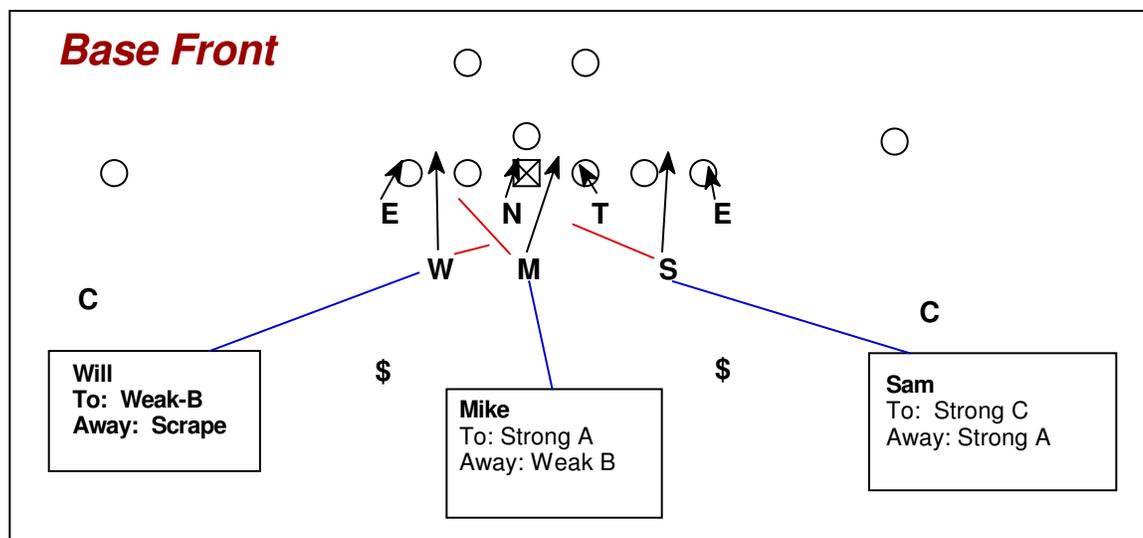
Base 4-3 Defense with Cover 4

Defensive Line - Must know basic numbering terminology, whatever your system uses. If they don't know the difference between a 1 and a 3, you can't move them easily.

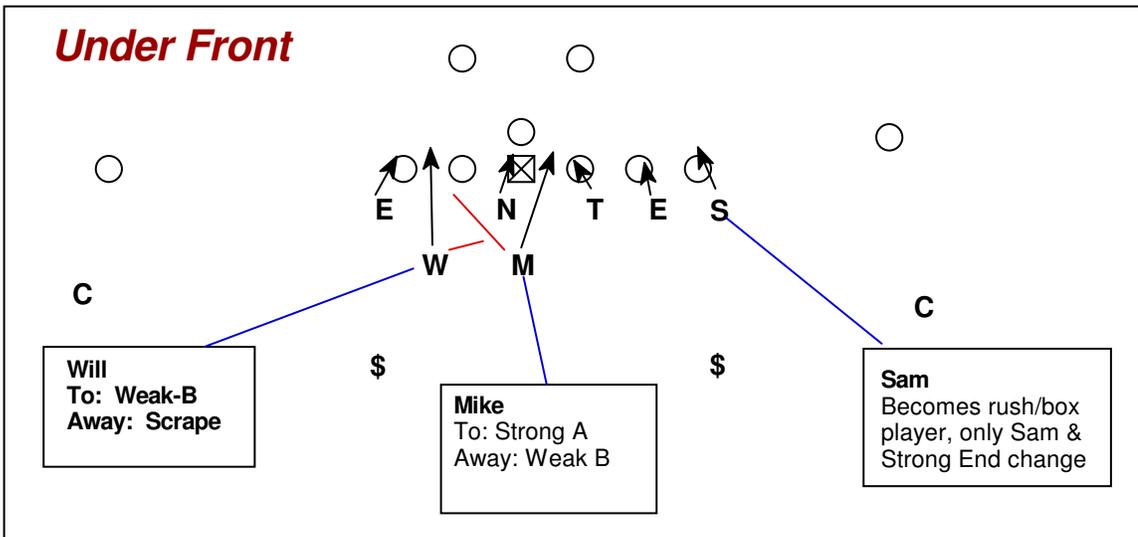
Tackles - Control the line, draw a double team by getting into the *V-of the neck*. Must force the C-G or G-T double team every play or your LB is getting hammered.

Defensive Ends - Box (Contain) players

Safeties: Fill over force if the play breaks contain. Reading #2 defender. Secondary play is tough to teach.



Under Front



Under Front

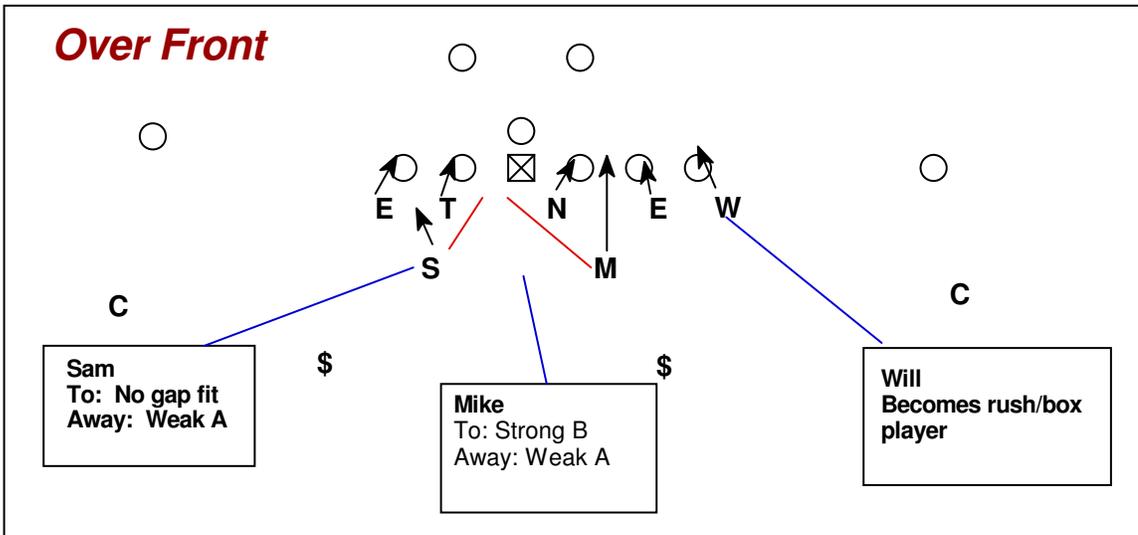
Sam Linebacker: Must be trained to play his new position. He has to be able to take the Power on, so teach him. Teach Tackle skills to the End as well.

Versus Doubles: Will Splits #2 and the ball. Sam only walks out if the TE is gone. As long as there is a TE in the game, the Sam *must* play in the box.

Purpose of the Under Front

They're running the ball to the strong side and you're having trouble stopping it. Now you have all of the gaps plugged up.

Over Front



Over Front

Sam Linebacker: No gap fit on run to, you have stacked a Tackle and End in front of him.

Will Linebacker: Comes up on the line to become rush/contain.

Mike Backer: Directly over top of Run to gap.

Purpose of the Over Front

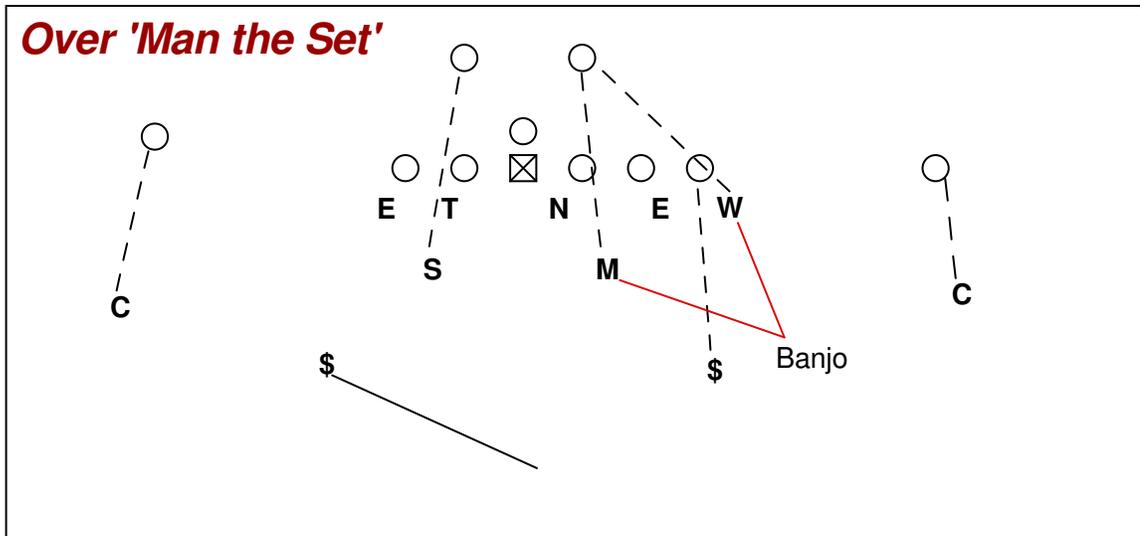
They're running 'over' here and we need to stop it weak side. You stack up your best tackler (Sam) behind the 3-tech to stop run to the weak side. If this doesn't do it, you need more people.

Slanting in a Gap Control Defense

In a gap control defense, slanting is used differently. Slanting in college vs. a zone team gets you eaten alive. The slanting lineman just gets washed out, and the RB cuts back.

Linemen get to the V-of the neck so they can control the OL, and let the linebacker stop the play. But they still need to move. A Defensive Lineman can't just sit there and get pounded on by a 320lb Offensive Lineman for 60 minutes.

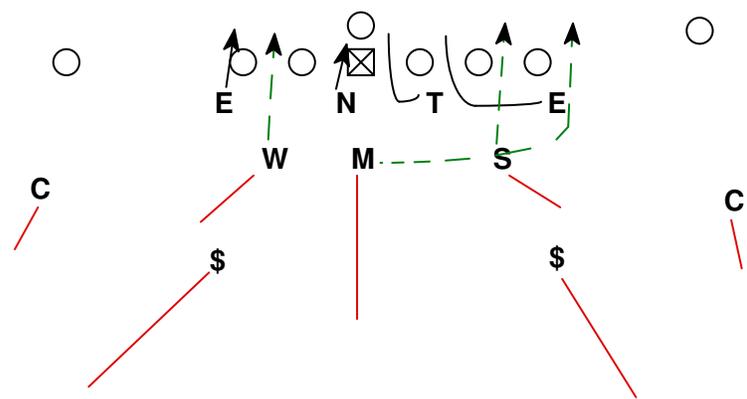
Stick and Long-Stick: Crossing the face and sticking into the next gap - or crossing two gaps and sticking up into the gap. More effective in getting linemen moving than the slant. You need some good football players to be able to get there though. Some coaches advise getting 1 yard off the ball to long-stick and 1/2 yard off the ball to stick. We would rather not because it tips off the stunt. In addition, offensive linemen are already recessing much of the time, so you may not need to.



Over 'Man the Set'

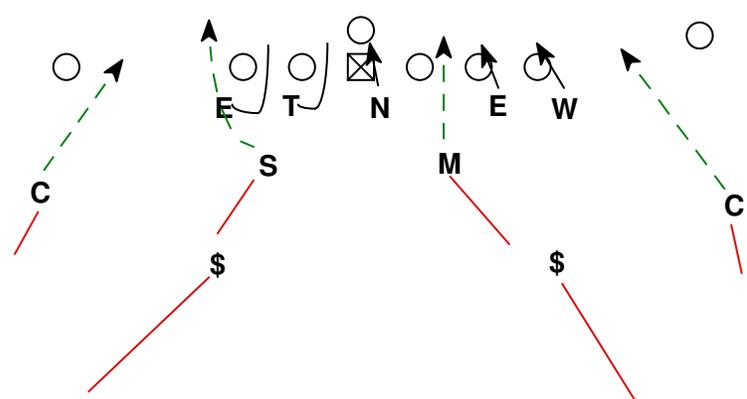
You can't run Over 'Man the Set' and have a great chance of sacking the quarterback. *Understand what your expectations should be when you make a defensive call.* Don't set your team up for failure either. If you move your secondary up tight to press, you better be bringing pressure. If there's no pressure, don't get up tight on them.

Base Pirate 2



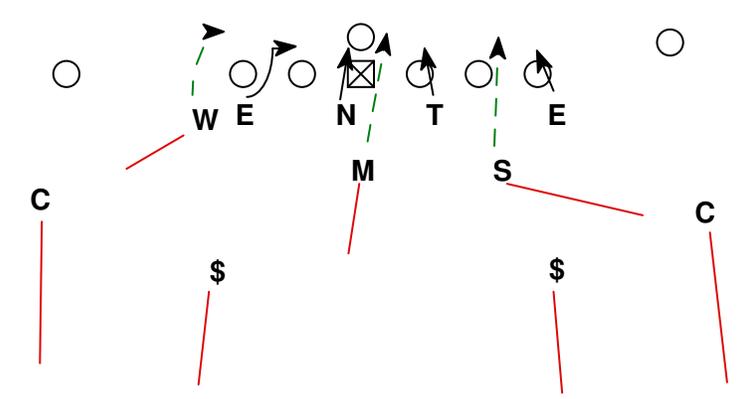
Line stunt using sticks and long sticks.
Corners: Read-tech, if ball is down you make the play.
 Can't run this with little girls.
Mike: Has box/contain. Once he gets to D-gap on ball away, he can change direction
Purpose: Designed to shut down strong run game. Play C2 because you want it to spill. (similar to the Tampa 2)
 How do you teach MLB to drop 25 yards or play the run? It's hard. Run it in practice all the time and make him for the QB to throw over him in the middle seam.

Over Pirate Weak 2



Over Pirate Weak 2
 A little easier to run because there is no long-sticking.
 (my notes: This isn't exactly how he had it draw up. But what he had drawn up made no sense to me - the Mike playing all the way over top to weak D-gap)
Coverage: Sam & Will curl off #2 - backers must get hands or wood on #2.
 Tampa 2 with Pirate stunts needs a smart Mike backer. Would prefer to be in Over for Pirate Weak - it is designed to stop the weakside run anyway.

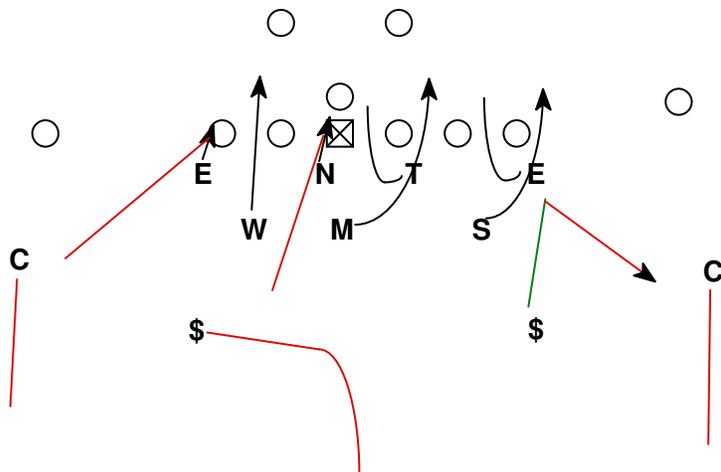
Base Slice 4



Base Slice 4
Will: Box & Contain player
Sam: Curl to flat player
Mike: Must be a low hip player, always make the QB throw over you. Safeties and corners play high hip - if the linebackers do, the QB just dumps it all over you. If the 2nd level players (LBs) don't play like 2nd level players, you get picked apart.

Zone Blitzes

Base Viking 3

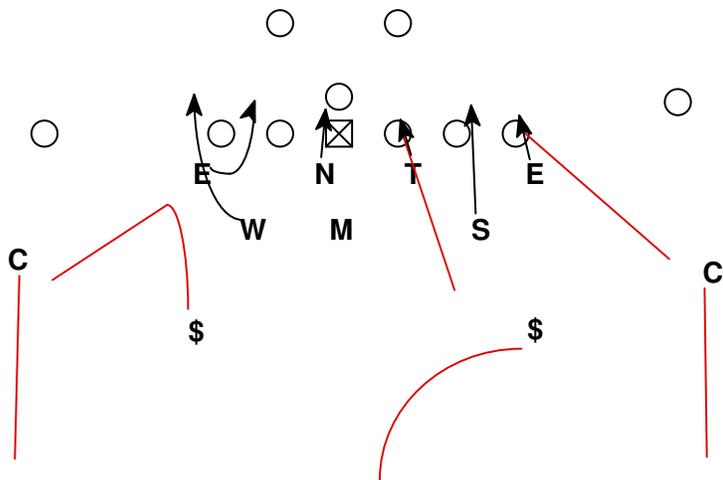


Base Viking 3

Purpose: Run this in 3rd & medium (4-6 yds)
Red zone, backed up - situations where they need to throw short passes.

Your nose dropper isn't going to get very deep, so if there is a good chance of a long throw, this wouldn't be very good.

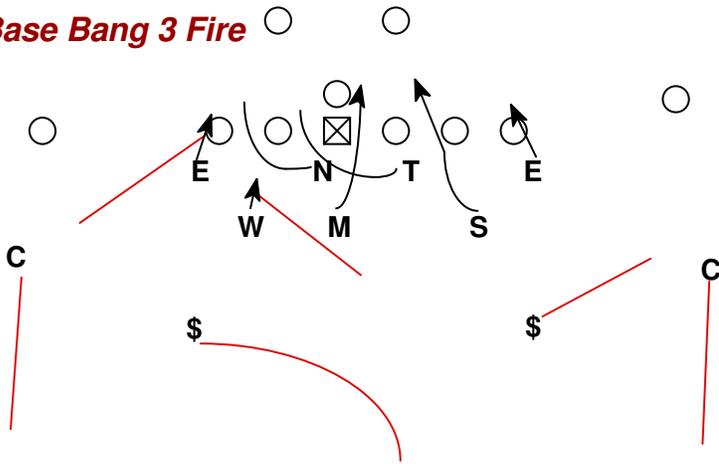
Base Steeler 3



Base Steeler 3

Fire Zone Blitzes

Base Bang 3 Fire



Base Bang 3 Fire

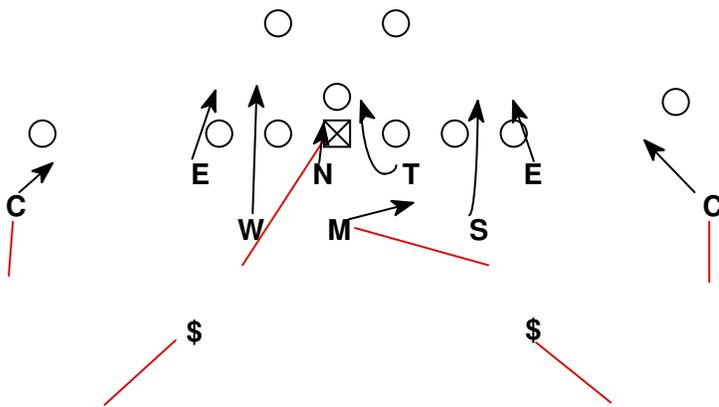
Nose: Sticking vs the run, keeps running vs. pass. He has contain. He is the "squeeze" player.

Strong Safety: Is "squeeze" to his side

Mike: Has to have the ability to redirect in this.

"Squeeze" means the player has to contain the play.

Base Sting 2 Fire



Base Sting 2 Fire

Purpose: Simple to run, can get picks on crossing routes. Do it when there isn't much space to travel (nose dropping & walling)

Mike: Curl off most danger #2 and walls it

It is C2, so Mike has to practice running downfield

Sting Switch: End and OLB switch gaps (End sticks)

Question & Answer Session

How to handle TE Trade:

Automatic shift to over, make a 'BLACK!' call. Usually play man behind it. You must have an automatic to deal with TE Trade.

Attacking the V of the Neck (further explanation):

The "V" is the upper sternum, so in their stance that is the aiming point on the OL. When he reaches, you follow that aiming point. Only when you know the ball is away, can you rip-cross face and run.

Defending 2x2 (Duo):

OLBs split #2 and EMOLS, look for ball up or down. Ball down, read for back away or back to. Can use an exchange system to make it easier - but if there is no exchange, OLBs have regular gap responsibility. This can mean the Will has a long way to go. Exchange system - have DE stick into 'B' Gap on weak side, Will now has 'C' Gap.

Coverage vs. 2x2

Play Cover 4 vs. 2x2, but 25% of the time they are bringing something and rolling into a Cover 3.

Do you use stemming?

No stemming, they could, but they don't. Everyone is running zone, it is more important to make them work than try to confuse them.

Trips Rules: Safety reads #2, other side Safety reads #3

Advantages of the Under: It is a simulation of a bastardized 50 front. It just sures up the C-gap.

How to get a LB to fill a gap:

Ball down to your side, gap fill. You can't ignore line keys though. They go over line keys in spring and summer. Set up linemen (groups of 3) and run scenarios versus line blocking. It is easy versus a running team, but spread teams make it much tougher.