

FORCE, SPILL and LEVERAGE the 3 keys to stopping the running game

I hope I can help new coaches in understanding the basic concepts in defending the running game.

"If you can't **explain** it to a six-year-old, you don't understand it yourself." Albert **Einstein**

Terminology I will use is common terminology in coaching:

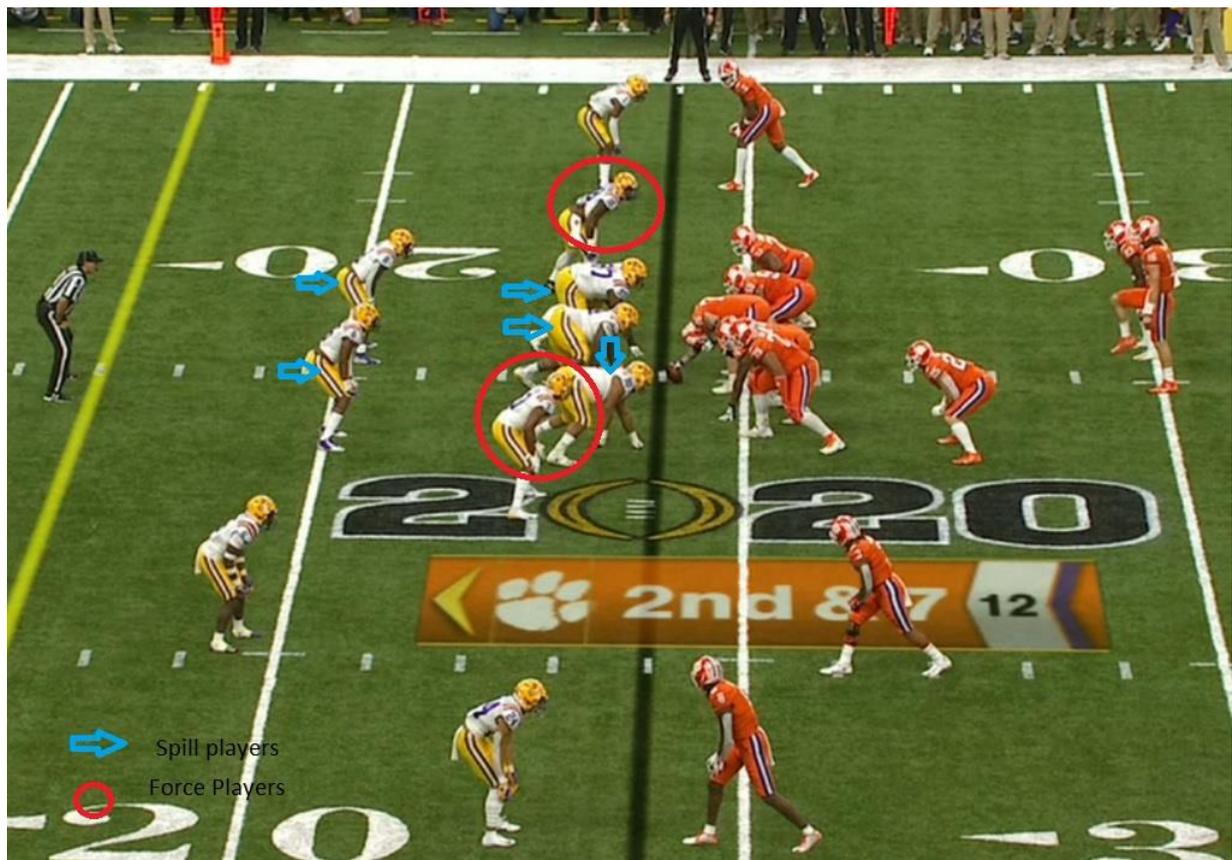
Force – The outside Force player, it is this players job to make the tackle or force the ball-carrier to the inside.

Spill – The spill players are inside, and they make the tackle or push the ball-carrier to the next Spill player or to the Force player.

Leverage – Leverage is defined as the angle and approach tacklers take to the ball-carrier, considering their role within the defensive play call, location on the field and the blockers or obstructions encountered towards the ball-carrier.

BCR – This tags onto the set, which can be thought of as Force away from the initial direction of the offence (**Boot – Counter - Reverse**). However, the responsibilities are slightly different so I will cover this separately.

In the photo below the players with **Red** circle are the Force players, and the players with **Blue** arrows will likely be the Spill players. Different schemes dictate different responsibilities. I will endeavour to give you a basic overview and give the tactics and techniques for these responsibilities.



Force

Assigned players on the edges of the box are the force players, and this can be a variety of different players depending on the scheme. Scheme variances will have to wait for another article.

The Force players job is to tackle the ball carrier or make sure to ball carrier goes back tp the strength of the defence (the spill players) or if the ball carrier insists on getting outside, the ball carrier has to go so deep that the defence can pursue and tackle the ball carrier for a loss of yards. The force player must understand that the better they do their job, the easier it is for the rest of the team.

Key Coaching Point

The goal is always to tackle the ball carrier. If a tackle can be made, make it, Force and Spill are secondary to tackling the ball carrier. However, the defender's approach to the tackle, should be correctly leveraged so if the tackle is avoided by the ball carrier, they achieve the secondary objective.

Key Coaching Point

Your players must know who the force players are. If they cannot tell you instantly in a classroom. Then in the heat of the game they stand no chance. Be relentless in checking who the force player is on every front versus every formation. This is a good reason to keep your scheme as simple as your practice volume and player experience dictates.

Errors made by the Force Player

- Be too wide or arrive too late, this makes it hard for the rest of the defence. I joke that the force player can stand on the side-line and claim to have done his job. But clearly the better the force the easier it is for the rest of the defence.
- Go too deep. The ideal situation is that the ball carrier must make a significant adjustment to go inside or make some sort of football movement or timing disruption which enables the defence to pursue. If the Force Player attacks too deep, the ball carrier can slide inside a block or the Force player, without a significant adjustment which would slow them up. I describe it as allowing the ball carrier to run the 400m corner. It barely disrupts their speed.
- Jump inside a block. This is a challenging one, because in some situation's players can do this and make a tackle for a loss. I would always advocate doing the job and working as a team defence. Against weaker teams this is possible but teaches bad habits for when the level of opposition improves. The worse thing to do is be indecisive and look like a Meerkat behind the blocker trying to find the ball carrier. Sometimes if the Force player loses trust of the pursuit he will start jumping inside. Make sure everyone fulfils their role. If we start trying to do other players jobs the defence breaks down quickly.
- Playing a lead blocker softly. If you are the Force player vs power, toss or jet sweep and have a blocker, attack the upfield shoulder with same foot and same shoulder showing colour to the outside and force the ball carrier back inside. With experience you can start to play the blocker with hands but must force the issue and not be driven backwards. In some situations, the defender will have to give ground along the line of scrimmage to maintain outside leverage, however they must give ground grudgingly.



Defender attacks much larger blocker with same foot/same shoulder and Forces ball carrier inside

This is a lot of information. Let's look at some film which will help clarify these points.

Clip One

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrwkMrxpKv4&list=PL-IXmln4Tr8iwEUHSqMyJzQAgySw4ERl&index=1>

Here #3 does a fantastic job of Force. He takes on the blocker, at a good depth, and while he does get pushed out expanding the gap, he gives enough resistance for the inside out pursuit to make the tackle.

Notice how he uses elite level hands to take on the blocker. He shows colour to force the RB inside, but also keeps his hips square in case the ball-carrier insists on getting to the side-line.

A less experienced player can be effective by taking the blocker on with inside shoulder and inside foot (in this example the left foot and left shoulder). The disadvantage is that the defender gets a little closer to the blocker and may find it harder to separate from the blocker.

Clip Two

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WSGxRH_sQDg&list=PL-IXmln4Tr8iwEUHSqMyJzQAgySw4ERl&index=2

Clip one was all very clean and gives a perfect example. It can be messier as this next clip shows. Again #3 has force. He takes on the blocker centrally. At this level it might be because it is a boundary run. I would advise to keep it simple and attack outside shade, until players fully understand the concepts.

Again #3 does not get pushed back and forces the ball carrier to cut inside. But then he almost makes an error and moves inside. The RB sees this and goes outside his block, however #3 recovers enough and because it is a boundary run the ball carrier runs out of space.

This clip does give an idea of a potential error and #3 should have trusted his inside pursuit.

Also, of note (and without knowing the scheme and play call here I could be wrong), I would say that #6 was too quick to the outside and did not trust the Force. It worked out OK here but can be a fatal flaw if Force player pushes back inside and the inside pursuit has over pursued. Then everyone starts losing trust and we do not have a structured leverage-based defence.

Clip Three

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZSA-ejuyr0&list=PL-IXmln4Tr8iwEUHSqMyJzQAgySw4ERl&index=3>

In this clip we see Force being broken. This is what an offence wants to achieve on a perimeter run, and they try many ways of doing this.

#18 has force, and he is already at a disadvantage by alignment. I would always advise Force players to help themselves by alignment within reason. And in this case would say line up on the outside shoulder of #5 (another disclaimer, I do not know game plan or scheme of this team, just using film to explain the concepts)

Because of the speed of the jet sweep and the tight alignment #18 does not Force the ball carrier inside. The ball carrier gets outside and can get his shoulders turned without breaking stride which gives him a positive run. #7 the safety is forced to adjust his leverage because of what he sees in front of him. #7 and all the inside out pursuit players were expecting a cut back created by Force from #18, which would have resulted in significantly reduced yardage.

Clip Four

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAmRBfKDqw4&list=PL-IXmin4Tr8iwEUHSqMyJzQAgdySw4ERI&index=4>

As I mentioned, offences find different ways to break Force, so a blocker is not always involved. This will also come up under BCR (football is complex!!), but I want to show this clip here. Force men are #18 and #3. With the run action to the defence right, #18 attacks the Tight Ends outside shoulder for force. #3 keeps his hips square, and shuffles down keeping his Force while closing down the space (commonly called PUP technique, I will expand later). However, he takes one too many steps, and reacts late to the QB pull and does not have the leverage to make the tackle or force inside.

Clip Five

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouid1iwDadc&feature=youtu.be>

Last film clip on Force. Which ties us nicely onto Spill. The running play is initially attacking the middle of the defence.

The inside is solid and does not allow a gap, this Spills the ball carrier to the outside where the Force players #3 and #18 should lay in wait.

But #18 is not disciplined, and slides inside, allowing the ball carrier to escape the defence and run for a large gain.

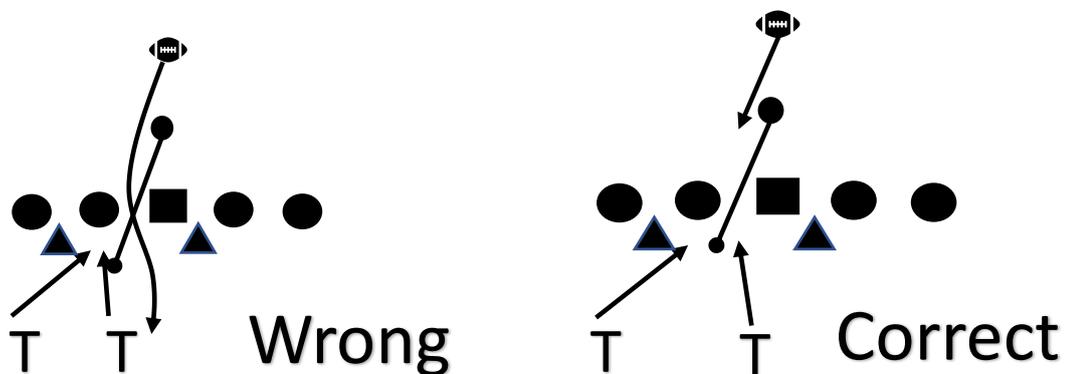
Spill

The spill players are the inside out players they will make the tackle or Spill the ball carrier to the next gap or to the edge of the defence (the Force player)

As with Force the scheme variances will have to wait for another article. But gap responsibilities are important to understand. Not only should the defender know which gap he has (depending on the flow, or other keys) they should also know where the next defenders are coming from. A classic example of this would be versus and ISO. The blocker will attack a gap which creates two gaps. Each defender responsible should take on the opposite shoulders of the blocker. This will result in a tackle or a spill to the next gap or to Force player.

However, if the defenders both attack the same shoulder, then a gap opens for the ball carrier. Linebackers should play as a pair, trapping the ball carriers.

This is best shown in the below diagrams:



Lets look at some more film:

Clip Six

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSC1CxNDg0M>

Here all the inside gaps are filled, forcing the ball carrier outside. The Force player is very aggressive, however manages to secure the tackle for a loss.

Clip Seven

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEBLkPnAEV8&list=PL-IXmIn4Tr8iwEUHSqMyJzQAgdySw4ERI&index=9>

Here is a good example where all the inside gaps are filled, with a defensive lineman penetrating quickly to make the ball carrier take action quickly.

Penetration of the offensive line can be good which will tackle the ball carrier for a loss or Spill quickly to the Force. Be careful that the penetrator does not go too deep before coming under control or losing leverage, otherwise it can create a seam between the next defenders.

I believe that #24 has Force on this call, however a Wide Receiver crack blocks him, which puts #1 into a "Crack Replace" role.

Crack Replace is when a Wide Receiver blocks the Force Player from outside in. The defender responsible for this Wide Receiver in man coverage, or Zone area must take on the responsibility of the Force Player (There are scheme variances on this which again will have to wait for a Part 2!!)

#1 is in a good position for Force, unfortunately his Technique lets him down on this occasion.

Clip Eight

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgtPij-mU0E&list=PL-IXmIn4Tr8iwEUHSqMyJzQAgdySw4ERI&index=10>

Gaps inside are not normally very large, however players should still play accurately from the edge of the gap, so players make the tackle, or spill to the next defender. Crossing a gap, or playing centrally in a gap, gives better opportunities to the Ball Carrier for a cutback.

In this clip #5 is BCR so he squeezes the gap but must respect the QB pull. This leaves a large gap for #11 who uses leverage really well to attack the ball carriers right hip eliminating the cut back.

BCR

BCR stands for Boot, Counter and Reverse. This is usually the force player away from the initial offensive flow. The keys for this player when the flow goes away are:

- Keep hips square to the line of scrimmage and shuffle – misdirection plays usually have a lot of speed coming back. If the player has turned to face the initial flow, or crossed his feet, he will not have time to recover and leverage to play.
- Be aware of any plays that can come back – Boot, counter and reverse are only a few of the plays that can come back. Throwback screens and Zone read are other examples that the player should be aware of.
- Do not get too close to line of scrimmage – The closer a player gets to the line of scrimmage the easier it is for them to get blocked or held up in traffic.

Clip Nine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpFshKTWlrk&list=PL-IXmln4Tr8iwEUHSqMyJzQAgySw4ERI&index=7>

#18 (left of defence) and #6 (right) are the Force players. The initial flow is towards #18 so he attacks the near blocker, gaining good depth with outside leverage.

See how #6 has his hips square and is shuffling slowly inside. Eyes looking at what could happen. Unfortunately, when he sees the QB without the ball he does not progress with “what could also happen” turns his shoulders fractionally, and then it is too late. If he saw this coming, he could Force the ball into #7 and have a negative play for the offence.

Clip Four (repeat)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAMRBfKDqw4&list=PL-IXmln4Tr8iwEUHSqMyJzQAgySw4ERI&index=4>

I just wanted to go back to this clip to expand on some terminology and a slightly different technique. #3 here is playing PUP technique (**P**in **U**Pfield shoulder). This has developed to defend Read zone plays. Here #3 is the edge of the rush, he squeezes down keeping his hips square and should not allow anything outside him. In this clip you can see the margins of error are small.

I hope this helps. There is so much more to cover I have come to the reality that a part 2 is required.

all the best

Simon Hatcher
simondhatcher@gmail.com