

OFFENSIVE LINE FUNDAMENTALS

BY STACY SEARLES

Some guys like to scream and holler about “block that guy” or just focus on assignments. I am a firm believer that a player must be fundamentally sound and understand the progression of “blocking that guy.” The following is a list of fundamentals that we do as often as possible. Some of these drills the players can work on by themselves during the off-season without pads.

I try to do most all of these drills, time permitting, daily in spring practice. During the season, as time for fundamentals gets squeezed, I emphasize the specific drills on different days. Monday will usually be a “lighter” practice so we work on the pass fundy (fundamental) drills. Tuesday would be a contact practice so we would always do our “heavy” run fundys on this day. Wednesday I would go back to work on the pass fundy drills and not quite as much of the heavy run fundys.

Run Fundamentals

1. Stance

We work out of a balanced stance that we can run block, take a pass set or pull from. We do not want to tip off our opponents by being too “tight” or heavy on our hand.

• Points of Emphasis (Photos 1-3)

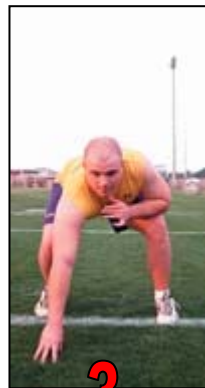
- A. Feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart
- B. Drop elbows down on knees
- C. Right/Left hand extended out in front of Right/Left foot
- D. Toe to instep stagger
- E. Weight equally distributed on 1/3's (2 feet and hand)



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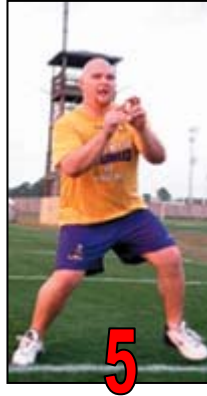
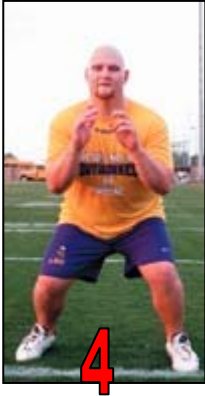
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2. Duck Demeanor Drill

Drill used in both run and pass fundys for warm-up.

- Points of Emphasis

A. Stance - feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart – drop down like a LB with chest over knees – weight on balls of feet. (Picture 4)



B. Coach gives direction - Right/Left, forward/backward when going right/left player will always lead step and slide back foot – shuffle – right foot move 6”, left foot move 6” (Picture 5) ... carry hands high in front of face and look ready to strike punch. When moving backward/forward power step in “duck-like” fashion – keep elbows tucked to the rib cage, pumping them in running form. Keep feet close to ground. Always keep a good base – don’t let feet click together.

3. Angle Boards

Set up five boards on line at a 45-degree angle.

A. Check first for good stance. (Picture 6)

B. OL toes are on the line and he takes good zone step with near foot to the board and power steps down the board. Make sure that they use good base and pump arms close to their body. (Picture 7)

C. Flip the boards and go the other way to get steps in both directions.



4. Down Block/Reach

Using the same 5 boards at a 45-degree angle, have the OL on left side down block right while the OL on right side reach block. Have 5 defenders 1 yard off the ball in four-point stance.

A. Down Block Right

Used by left tackle when left guard pulling or left guard when center blocking back. (Picture 8)



Good 1st step and toe turn - across board - foot to midline of defender - Hat to "V" of neck. (Picture 9)

Shoot right hand to far number and left hand to the rib cage or shoulder pad. (Picture 10)

B. Reach Block - Block used on inside zone to cover up or gain outside leverage on defender. Center and right side – do this while left side blocks down.



Good first step - "drop step" - hat goes to play side number and press the defender off the L.O.S. Press the defender without turning the hips.

- Flip the boards and the left side will now reach block and the right side will down block.
- Get more work by doing all five at the same time.

5. Chutes

Use this teaching tool to get the players to keep pad level down.

A. Fit

Five defenders stand at edge of chutes, bent down, with palms up to hold offensive player elbows and support them. Offensive players put face on chest of defender with hands on breastplate of defender. Bow neck and bend knees with weight on the defender. Have a semi-flat back “looking thru the eyebrows.” On command offensive player will step with right foot first and press the player off the L.O.S. “hitting on the rise.” Have players drive off with good base, short power steps. Emphasize bending the knees and starting in the “fit position,” Repeat and step with the left foot first. (Picture 11)



B. Step to Fit

Position the five defenders in DL position on the other side of chute ... OL starts in their run stance. Objective of the drill is to get first two steps in the ground and explode with the three power points – two hands and head gear (Picture 12) explode through the chin and drive defender approximately two yards and then get back in the fit position. To ensure hands inside, I get the players to clap their hands as they explode off the L.O.S. Do not wind up, just cock your elbows back slightly, clap and hit “hat and hands” simultaneously into defender. Make them (Picture 13) hold the fit to train their thighs to stay in this position. Repeat with the left foot now. (Picture 14)



C. Drive

Putting it all together now. Position the five defenders in DL position on the other side of the chute. From the stance, fire off the ball with right foot, clap (Picture 15) hands and explode with hat and hands under the chin hitting on the rise. Drive defender off the ball 8-10 yards. On whistle to stop, player sprints back to the chute. Make sure they have good base the entire 8-10 yards.

6. T-Boards

Drill used to teach inside zone blocking while covered by a DL.

A. Vs DL

Using the same five boards aligns them perpendicular to the line. OL put back of heels even with the bottom of the board, offset to the right of the board. Align defender in DL four-point position – straddling the board 1 yard from offensive player. On the snap OL with zone step to the right leading with right foot second step will gain ground stepping near the board without crossing it. Strike with hat/hands. Hat under the chin and hands to breast pate and drive the defender down the board. Make sure they keep a good base all the way. On the whistle they sprint back thru the end of the boards. This is a way to teach effort on the drill. Repeat by off setting to the right and zoning left. Defenders will give an initial shock then give ground grudgingly not stuffing the offensive player.

B. VS LB

Drill used to teach inside zone blocking vs. a LB. Align the defenders five yards deep and two yards to the left. On the snap the defenders will shuffle over to the end of the board and give offensive player a “shot.” Off-set the OL to the left and have them zone step across the boards, carrying themselves lower for a longer period of time and then exploding through the defender with their hat and hands. Have them drive the defenders 8-10 yards then sprint back on the whistle. Repeat by offsetting to the right and zoning left.

7. Reach Block/18" Cutoff block

Drill used to teach OL how to reach and cutoff on run plays.

- Align the five defenders in DL position, off-set to the right of the OL. Ex 5 Tech, (Picture 16) 3 Tech, Shad nose right, 1 Tech, 4I Tech.
- Start with RG/RT - Have them "reach block" the defender. Take a good zone step (i.e. open step) with right foot don't cross over with left foot. Hat goes to play side to cover up the defender. Shoot right hand to breastplate play side and be strong with it, control hand – your left hand put it on backside arm or shoulder pad. Press the defender off the L.O.S. Don't jump turn but press the defender staying "on track."



- Have the center do the same as above.

- With the LG/LT we are working the 18" cutoff block - tell the OL to pick out a spot 18" inside the defenders. Open step with right foot, crossover with left foot (Picture 17) and rip the left shoulder underneath the defender. Run a 40-yard sprint thru the spot and rip the left shoulder underneath the defender until you clear your hips, then press the defender north and south getting inside out. Common mistakes are stepping and looking at the defender. He will beat you inside if you do this. (Picture 18) Repeat this drill to the other side (i.e., reaching LT/LG/Center; cutting off with RG/RT). (Picture 19)



The previous drills are our base-run fundamentals. We will also work on our combination drills for zone and gaps plays based on the emphasis of the day. All of these drills will help your OL with the basic block that they must do to help you win a championship. Base block, reach block, cutoff block



PASS BLOCKING FUNDAMENTALS

Pass Fundamentals Progression

Stance

Everything starts with a solid stance. Our down stance will be the same on pass as it was on run. Our Up stance or "Race Horse" stance as we refer to it will be as follows: Feet will be slightly wider than shoulder width apart. The Center's stance will be balanced with his left hand resting on his thigh. The guards' stance will be with a toe to instep relationship with their feet, elbows resting on their thigh pads, with their back slightly arched. The tackles' stance will be similar but they may have more of a stagger but try to not be more than a toe to heel relationship with their feet. We want the stance to be comfortable but not too spread out where they can "kick" or "post" set effectively.

Drills

1. **Duck** - same as before.

2. Mirror Drill

Drills used to help train the OL to move feet laterally without crossing over. Set 2 cones five yards apart on line. Have defender and offensive player face each other. On snap count have the defender run back and forth cone to cone. The offensive player will mirror him. (Pictures 20, 21)



Coaching Points:

A. Stance - Feet slightly wider than shoulder width.

- Bent knees with chest over Knees (like a LB)
- Lock hand to wrist behind back.

B. Big Eyes on Target - Pick out small target to focus on the defender's jersey.

C. Lead Step - when going right lead with right foot and vice-versa. Keep base shoulder width apart.

D. Shuffle - Right foot goes 6" left foot goes 6".

3. Bull Drill

Drill used to teach OL to top the bull rush.

- Have defender and OL face each other.

- **Stance** - Same as above but the defender will now put his hands on the breastplate of OL. OL will start with hands outside the body on shoulders. (Picture 22)

- On command to start the defender will start to "bull rush" the OL back. OL will replace his hands to breast plate and give ground grudgingly.

- OL should take small 6" step backwards with feet slightly "ducked" out. (Picture 23)



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- Keep defender locked out with arms extended and hands on breast plate.

- After about 3 yards of giving ground grudgingly have the OL "pop it." Hop and try to regain leverage by popping the feet out and back to stop the charge of the defender.



4. Push/Pull Drill

Drill used to teach OL body control when pass protecting.

- Have defender and OL face each other.
- Stance - OL drop down like a linebacker with hands locked behind back.
- Defender will put left hand behind OL's neck and right hand on shoulder.
- On command to start the defender will give steady pressure (either to push or pull) on the OL.
(Picture 24)
- If the defender pulls, the OL will sink his hips and work up into the defender grudgingly.
- If the defender pushes, the OL will brace up with a slight stagger and arch the back to fight the pressure.
- Have defender push/pull several times but not in a herky jerky fashion – be steady – this teaches the OL balance and body control.
- Tell OL he has a telephone pole down the center of his body.

5. Combo Drill

Combination of the three previous drills. Put it all together. Mirror/Bull/Push/Pull

- Stance - Have defender and OL face each other. OL drop down like a linebacker and put hands on the outside of defenders' shoulders. Defender starts with hands inside. (Picture 25)
- On command to go, OL replace hands to breastplate being strong with hands. (Picture 26)



- Coaching point - OL work to control drill with strong hands.

- Defender will now grab shoulder of the OL and run side to side (mirror) forward and backwards (Bull, Push/Pull). (Picture 27)
- OL will shuffle side to side with defender being strong with the lead hand.



- When the defender "bulls," fight pressure and bow up.
- When the defender "pulls," sink hips and walk up into him grudgingly. (Picture 28)
- This is an up tempo drill with the defender trying to throw the OL off balance.

6. Kick down the Board

Drill to teach the OL to keep hips square on speed rushing defender.

- Stance - Start in race horse (up) stance.
- Set five boards on line - at a 45-degree angle. This is for right side players only. Have OL lineman start with heels even with end of board. On command to start have the OL kick the length of the board – approximately 4 yards.
- Emphasize carrying the weight on inside half of body while keeping hips down and square.
- Explode backwards down the board while staying square.
- Have the five OL compete to see who is the quickest.
- Flip the boards to the left for left side OL and repeat.

7. Off sides Rush on the Board

- Same purpose as previous drill but now incorporate a defender who is basically offside. Teach the OL to really explode back and get hands on the defender and still keep hips square to LOS.
- Have the defender position himself to the outside of defender with his toes even with the OL toes.
- On command to start have the defender try and grab the back of the OL shoulder pads and clear his hips by the OL.
- On command to start the OL will explode back with a kick set keeping his hips square and straddling the board.
- Work to bat the defenders' grab hand away with outside arm and stab the defender with inside arm.
- You must stay low and square to get back on this drill.
- Flip boards for other side OL. The previous drills dealt mainly with the movement part of pass protection. The next drills will be the basic punch drills that we like to incorporate into practice.

7. Punch Away

Drill used to teach OL to strike a blow and keep their hands up.

- Have defender facing the OL, hold a hand shield tight to his chest leaning on the OL. (Picture 29)
- OL get in a LB stance with hands up in front of face, pressed against the bag with arms semi extended.
- OL will start the drill by pushing the defender back.
- Defender will walk steadily with pressure into the OL.



- OL should time his punch and strike a 6" blow to the pad. It should be in a "jack-hammer" fashion not a pushing fashion. As the OL strikes a blow he should always reset his feet. Try to strike blow with both feet on the ground. (Picture 30)

9. A-B DRILL

Drill to make sure OL are setting with their hands up and ready to strike.

- Defender holds a hand shield like a baseball bat and swings it hard at the OL face.
- Two reps from race horse stance (up), two reps from down stance.



- Have OL in his stance and on command to start the defender swings the bag. (Picture 31)
- Have OL take a kick set and punch the bag. (Picture 32)

- Make sure the OL takes the proper set not coming up out of his hips and striking a blow. (Pictures 33, 34, 35)



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10. 1 on 1 Pass

Try to now apply all the drills we have just discussed in pass protection vs. the DL in a live situation. Try to do this daily. Use the terms of these drills now in coaching live 1-on-1 pass and the OL will understand why you have been doing these drills.

All these drills I have learned from several different stages of my career as a player and as a coach. You can always learn something new from good coaches that you are around. I hope some of these drills can help you in developing quality offensive linemen.



Georgia biographies **STACEY SEARLES**

Birthdate: May 19, 1965

Birthplace: Rome, Ga.

High School: Trion

College: Auburn, '90

Coaching Experience:

1992-93, Auburn (Graduate Assistant); 1994-2000, Appalachian State (Off. Line); 2000-2002, Cincinnati (Off. Line); 2003-06, LSU (Off. Line); 2007, Georgia (Off. Line).

Playing Experience:

Auburn (1984-87) – First team All-America offensive lineman in 1987; First team All-SEC in '86 and '87; Ken Rice Award as Auburn's best blocking lineman in '87; named to Auburn's "Team of the '80's"; played in 1988 Japan Bowl and Senior Bowl; 2000 NCAA Award of Valor; drafted in fourth round of 1988 NFL draft by San Diego Chargers where he played in '88 and '89; Miami Dolphins in '90; New York/New Jersey Knights, World League of American Football in '91.

Stacy Searles was named offensive line coach for the Bulldogs in January, 2007, after serving four years coaching the offensive line at LSU during which time the Tigers won a national championship (2003), one SEC title (2003), and two SEC East titles (2003 and '05).

A native of Trion, Ga., and 1990 graduate of Auburn, Searles was an All-America lineman for the Tigers in 1987 when he was a teammate of current Georgia defensive line coach Rodney Garner. Prior to joining the LSU staff, he coached the offensive line at Cincinnati (2000-02), Appalachian State (1994-2000), and served as a graduate assistant at Auburn (1992-93).

LSU's offensive unit in 2006 finished first in the SEC in total offense and scoring offense and was third in rushing offense and passing offense.

Searles made a habit of producing All-America linemen for LSU. He coached two First-Team All-Americans in Stephen Peterman and Ben Wilkerson and a Second-Team All-America in Andrew Whitworth.

n addition, during that four-year stretch, LSU's offensive line produced a pair of First-Team Academic All-Americans in Rodney Reed and Rudy Niswanger. LSU had an offensive lineman named First-Team Academic All-America four straight years.

Niswanger became the most decorated student-athlete in school history in 2005, winning the Draddy Award as college football's top scholar-athlete as well as being the inaugural recipient of the Wuerffel Trophy.

Searles coached five former Tigers to roster spots in the NFL with Whitworth being a second round pick of the Cincinnati Bengals in 2006; Peterman a fourth round pick of the Dallas Cowboys in 2004; and Wilkerson, Niswanger and Nate Livings signing free agent contracts.

Searles' 2004 offensive line consisted of Rimington Award winner (Ben Wilkerson) along with First Team All-SEC offensive tackle Whitworth. LSU led the SEC in rushing that year with over 193 yards per contest. Searles joined the staff at LSU after a two-year stint as offensive line coach at Cincinnati. During his two-year stay with the Bearcats, Cincinnati played in two bowl games as well as winning the school's first conference title since 1964 by capturing the 2002 Conference USA crown. In 2002, Searles coached an offensive line that helped Cincinnati lead Conference USA in total offense (397.5 yards per game), while averaging 29.2 points a contest.

Prior to joining Cincinnati, Searles served as an assistant coach at Appalachian State from 1994-2000, helping the I-AA squad to five playoff appearances and to a pair of Southern Conference titles. He also coached players to five All-America and 15 all-conference honors in seven years as an offensive line and tight ends coach at Appalachian State.

While at Appalachian State, Searles was presented with the NCAA Award of Valor, which has only been awarded eight times and honors those who "when confronted with a situation involving personal danger, averted or minimized potential disaster by courageous action or noteworthy bravery." He was recognized for his act of courage following a head-on collision involving a van carrying members of the Mountaineer football team and support staff on Sept. 30, 2000.

With the Appalachian State van burning, Searles pulled out two staff members, who were trapped in the vehicle (11 other passengers in the van were able to escape on their own). Moments after Searles got the two staff members to safety, the van was engulfed in flames. Searles, who had been traveling on the team bus behind the van, had saved the life of his student assistant coach (Jonathan Taylor) and assistant athletic trainer (Tony Barnett). Taylor, who was airlifted to a hospital, spent three weeks in intensive care before making a complete recovery.

Searles got his start in coaching as a graduate assistant at Auburn in 1992, working with the Tiger squad that posted a perfect 11-0 mark in 1993.

As a player, Searles earned First Team All-America honors from both the Associated Press and Football News as a senior at Auburn in 1987. Searles was a three-year starter for Auburn, blocking for Heisman Trophy winner Bo Jackson in 1985 and All-America Brent Fullwood in 1986. He participated in four bowl games as a member of the Auburn football team.

A First-Team All-Southeastern Conference selection as both a junior and senior, he was honored with the team's Ken Rice Award as the school's best blocking lineman in 1987. He played in both the Japan Bowl and the Senior Bowl following the 1987 season.

In 1990, the Birmingham Post-Herald named Searles to the Auburn team of the 1980's.

Searles was a fourth round draft pick by the San Diego Chargers in 1988, playing two seasons there before moving to the Miami Dolphins for the 1990 season. He ended his professional career in 1991 with the New York/New Jersey Knights of the World League of American Football.

Searles graduated from Auburn in with a degree in marketing and transportation in 1990. He followed that with a Master's degree in higher education administration from Auburn in 1995.