

# *THE TOOLKIT*



*INTRODUCTION  
TO THE  
NFL WAY TO PLAY*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                        |       |
|----------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>Section 1</b>                       |       |
| The NFL Way to Play Playbook           | 3-28  |
| <b>Section 2</b>                       |       |
| Discovering the 5 Shields of the Game  | 29-34 |
| <b>Section 3</b>                       |       |
| Developmental Content Roadmap          | 35-42 |
| <b>Section 4</b>                       |       |
| Tackling the Future with Flag Workbook | 43-56 |
| <b>Section 5</b>                       |       |
| NFL Flag Way to Play Award             | 57-58 |

**“Football isn’t nuclear physics,  
but it’s not so simple that you  
can make it simple. It takes  
some explaining to get  
it across.”**

**-John Madden**



THE PLAYBOOK



## MISSION

NFL Way to Play seeks to apply science, research, data and experience to promote proper playing technique, protect players from unnecessary risk and foster culture change to attain on-field excellence at all levels of the game.

**“If you always do what  
you’ve always done,  
you’ll always get what  
you’ve always gotten.”**

*Jessie Potter, Educator*



# NFL WAY TO PLAY AWARD

.....

The NFL will identify player techniques and performances that are consistent with the *Way to Play*. Each week during the NFL season, a player will be recognized in national media and awarded a Youth Football Equipment grant.

The League will also recognize and celebrate *Way to Play* techniques at the high school level. Hudl will ask users to submit film weekly for consideration for the *High School Way to Play Award*. A panel of football legends and experts will choose one video to be featured on NFL Network's Good Morning Football. The winning high school will also be awarded an NFL Youth Football Equipment grant.



# THE BREAKDOWN

## POSTURE

Proper posture at the start of a play before the ball is snapped is critical. Without placing athletes in a starting point that is strong, stable and allows for sight, the player will struggle to consistently display proper behavior throughout the play.

## APPROACH

What happens between the ball being snapped and prior to contact is called the approach. The most important traits players need to exhibit during the approach are for their knees to be bent, the pads down, and the head up.

## CONTACT

Players need to be confident, capable and consistent throughout the contact phase of a play. Way to Play developmental methods will help players maintain proper posture through the finish of a play (blocking or defeating a block AND tackling or breaking a tackle).





## FIVE SHIELDS OF THE GAME

The Five Shields of the Game represent the best means of protecting players from unnecessary risk and promoting on-field excellence. *Way to Play* techniques are focused on these areas and will serve to protect the game and its players at all levels.

Through the systematic approach of focusing on Posture, Drill Selection, Language, and Best Practices, we will position players to be more effective and efficient while playing in the Space and Speed phase of the game.

**“I’m sure that had I not been  
a coach, I would have been  
some form of a teacher.”**

*John Madden*





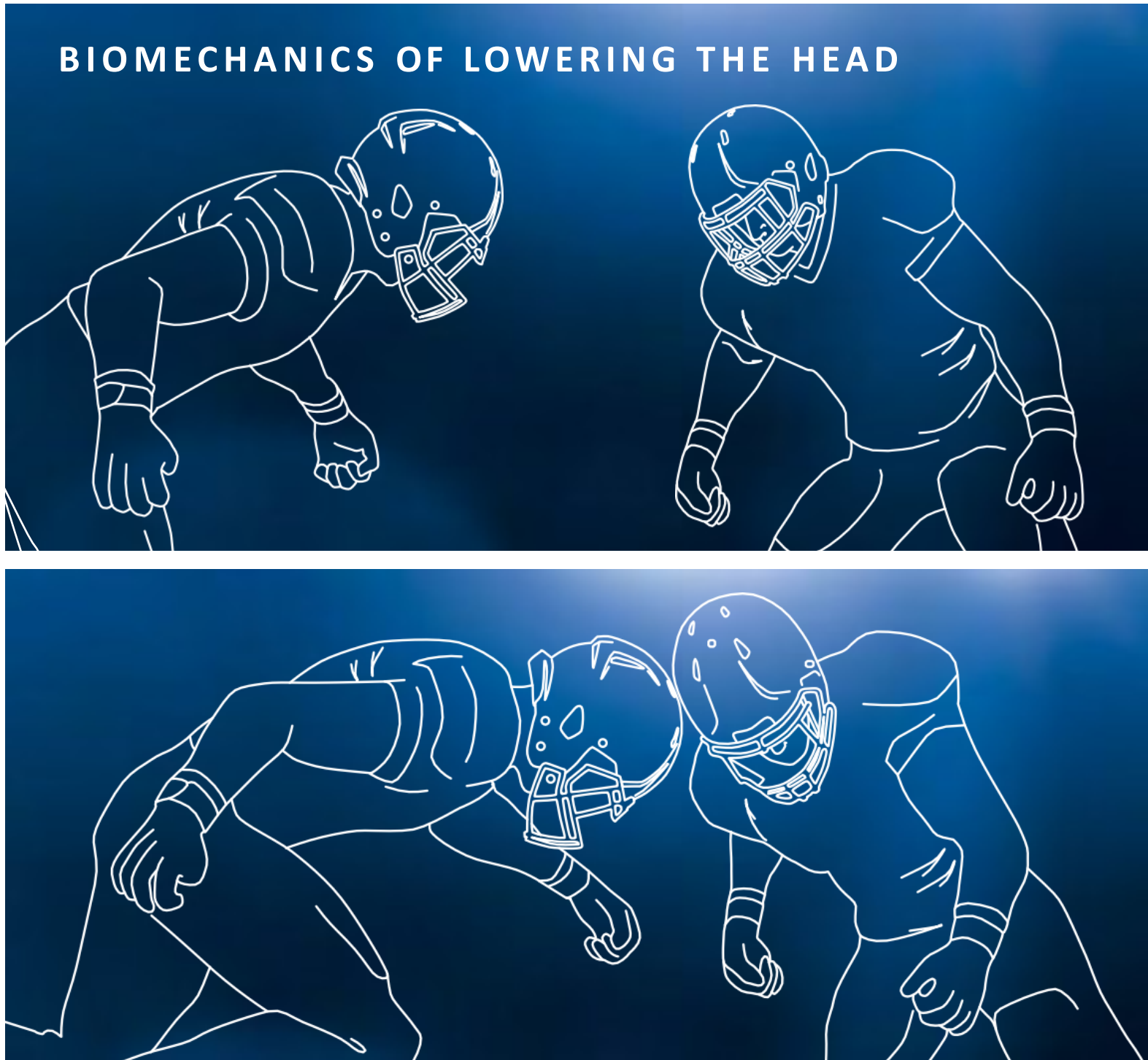
1



# POSTURE

Quality posture is the bedrock of athletic performance. An athlete’s posture can substantially limit their exposure to poor performance and injury. According to Dr. Allen Sills, NFL Chief Medical Officer, when the vertebrae of the spine are stacked in a neutral position, an athlete is in a better position to deliver or receive contact.

*Illustrated is an example of improper posture. The biometrics of lowering the head upon contact will significantly increase the chances of head and neck injury by the defensive and offensive player.*





# SPACE AND SPEED

.....  
Two areas of focus in the game are tackling and mobility blocks. The technique challenges in both skill sets are nearly identical. By focusing both skill sets under the same umbrella, new and different language will effectively communicate and teach how the game should be played on both sides of the ball.



# OFFENSE

.....  
Pass Set  
2nd Level Blocking  
Blitz Pick Ups

Kick-Out Blocks  
Trap Blocks  
Screens

# DEFENSE

.....  
Tackling Defeating a  
Block  
Rushing the Passer

# IN LINE BLOCKS

.....  
Base Blocking  
Backside Cutoff

Reach  
Combination Block





3



# DRILL SELECTION

Improper drills selected and practiced in player development will ingrain, reinforce or create performance behaviors that should not be part of the game. Any drill that focuses on use of the helmet, involves the motion of a player lowering the head prior to contact, or simulates a player diving headfirst below an opponent’s knees are inconsistent with the goal of *Way to Play*.

Consider these factors when selecting drills:

Cadence, Angles, Run/Pass Reads, Schematics, Sportsmanship

## DRILL EXAMPLES

**Fit Position Starting Point**  
*Engaged with opponent or blocking shield*

**Pad Level Drills**  
*Individual drills OL vs OL, DL vs DL with blocking pad*

**9 on 7 and 11 on 11 with Run Pass Reads**  
*All SY and GL should be worked in 11on 11team drills*

## PROHIBITED NFL DRILLS

**Board Drill / OL vs DL In-Line Run Blocking (artificially confined) Bull in the Ring / King of the Circle**

**Oklahoma Drill**

**Half Line Drill / Pods / 3-Spot without Run Pass Read**





4



# LANGUAGE

An effective way to change player behavior is to change coaching language. The helmet should never be used as a coaching cue or a teaching point in the game. Any coaching language that requires a player to focus on use of the helmet or targets an opponent above the collarbone or below the knee is inconsistent with the *Way to Play*.

STRIKE POINTS

DON'T COACH ABOVE COLLARBONE

COACHABLE STRIKING POINTS

- SHOULDER TO SHOULDER
- ARMPIT TO ARMPIT
- NUMBER TO NUMBER
- MIDLINE
- HIP TO HIP
- MID THIGH TO MID THIGH

DON'T COACH BELOW KNEE





Coaching cues focus the athlete’s attention either externally or internally. The ideal way to coach is through external coaching cues, which are more effective in producing high quality, whole body movements.

EXTERNAL COACHING CUES

✓ **Focuses attention on environment.**

*EXAMPLE: When you are attempting to jump as far as possible, I want you to focus your attention on pushing the ground away from you as fast as you can.*

INTERNAL COACHING CUES

✗ **Focuses on a body part or piece of equipment.**

*EXAMPLE: When you are attempting to jump as far as possible, I want you to focus your attention on extending your knees as rapidly as possible.*



# LANGUAGE TO USE

Using the right language automatically reinforces proper technique.

## POSTURE

Playing with proper spinal alignment by keeping the shoulders back and the head up

## HEAD UP

Focus on the head being up from player stance and through contact

## HEAD OUT

Moving the game toward the helmet being viewed only as a protective device

## KNEES BENT

Creating movement by beginning and moving in an athletic position

## PADS DOWN

Pad level affects a player’s ability to deliver and receive contact

## ANGLES

The game is about leveraging angles to create space, close space, block and make tackles

## HANDS FIRST

When possible, the hands should always initiate contact with an opponent

## CONSISTENCY

Practice is the key to creating replicable skills

## CONFIDENCE

Players must trust they’ve received the best coaching and preparation

## CAPABLE

The game is a tool to build the physical, mental, and emotional capacity of players



# LANGUAGE TO LOSE

Using the wrong language emphasizes improper technique.

**OFFENSE**

- Get Your Head Across
- Emphasis on “Hat Placement”
- The 3-Points Contact
- Head and Hands
- V-Neck Aiming Point
- Earhole
- Drive Helmet Through Target
- Screws on Screws
- Helmet Screws

**DEFENSE**

- Head-but and Press
- Emphasis on “Hat Placement”
- Earhole
- Drive Helmet Through Target
- Bite the Ball
- Screws on Screws
- Helmet Screws
- Helmet to Chin Relationship



5



# BEST PRACTICES

The game of football is the leading transformational sport in America. The combination of the physical, mental, and social demands separates the game from all others. Athletes need to be prepared in a holistic manner that prepares them for life after the game, regardless of the participation level.

- Total Wellness
- Nutrition Hydration
- Time Management



# TOTAL WELLNESS

.....

## MENTAL

The Best Practices inside the *Way to Play* aren't focused on making athletes physically "tougher." We want players to leave the game of football more mentally resilient and prepared to take on the challenges of life. This will be achieved through shifting the developmental focus more toward embracing the value of failing, lauding effort, communicating, and reestablishing our appreciation for how challenging the game of football can be.

## SOCIAL

Athletes at all levels of football are under more scrutiny than any other time in the history of the game. The constant exposure of the game through media outlets and social media has been phenomenal for the growth of football, but it has placed additional stress on players. Athletes need to be socially equipped to overcome these challenges and be educated on how to most effectively manage the heightened social demands of their environment. Also, the *Way to Play* Initiative will lead the charge in using media outlets and social media to educate fans, coaches, and athletes on what the future of football will be.

## PHYSICAL

A challenge with the game is the fact it's played all over the world by individuals who aren't exposed to or cannot afford high-level training/equipment. Having access to world-class training facilities shouldn't be a barrier for entry to the game. But it's imperative for those who coach or play football to be aware of the importance of being physically prepared for the rigors of it. A part of the mission of the *Way to Play* is to protect players from unnecessary risk, thus part of the focus will be on educating coaches and athletes on Best Practices related to hydration, training, sleep, skill acquisition, and flexibility.



PRO TIP

Try a pasta dish with some lean ground turkey meat sauce, or a chicken stir-fry with lots of rice and veggies.

NUTRITION

FUEL UP FOR GAME DAY

Eating and drinking right are just as important as improving skills and practicing plays to be successful on the field. Get ready for game day with some simple nutrition tips:

STEP 1 – CARB UP

Eat a bigger meal two to four hours before taking the field. Incorporate protein and antioxidants, with carbohydrates, if possible.

STEP 2 – SNACK ATTACK

Have a small snack or sports drink ready 30 to 60 minutes before kickoff. The key is not to fill your stomach, but to satisfy it.

3 KINDS OF FOOD TO AVOID

**Fatty and fried foods.** Greasy foods such as hamburgers and french fries are hard to digest and just sit in your stomach.

**Protein shakes and bars.** Protein supplements plays an important role in overall diet, but you should not consume a large quantity (within an hour) before a game.

**Artificial sweeteners.** These will stress your digestion, and the last thing anyone wants before a big game is an upset stomach.

Nutritional information provided by St. Vincent Sports Performance



PRO TIP

Ease digestion. Go for a high glycemic carbohydrate that absorbs quickly with minimal fiber.

NUTRITION

SNACKS ON THE SIDELINES

Halftime for coaches means a chance to reinforce what the team is doing and help your young athlete get better. For players, those few minutes also mean snacks.

This will be achieved through shifting the developmental focus more toward embracing the value of failing, lauding effort, communicating, and reestablishing our appreciation for how challenging the game of football can be.

*Try these easy options when orange slices just aren't cutting it:*

- Fig Bars
- Fruit Rope
- Bananas
- Granola Bars
- Dried Fruit
- Rice Krispies Treats®

For more snack ideas and recipes, visit [www.usafootball.com/parent](http://www.usafootball.com/parent)

# HYDRATION

## HOW TO STAY HYDRATED

Young athletes have a harder time cooling down during activity than adults, and the chances of them becoming dehydrated is a real problem — especially when fluids leave the body faster than they can be replaced. But what goes out must come back in. Hydrating before a game or practice is just as important as during it.

### LEARN IT

Dehydration symptoms:

- Feeling faint
- Headache
- Fever
- Intense thirst
- Not urinating for many hours
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Breathing faster or deeper than normal
- Skin numbness or tingling
- Muscle spasms
- Extreme tiredness

### TEACH IT

Make hydration a habit:

One of the best ways to stay hydrated is to get in the habit of drinking fluids every 20 minutes during the course of activity and after it ends.

### DO IT

When and how to hydrate:

**BEFORE ACTIVITY:** Drink 16-24 fluid ounces of water 10-15 minutes before activity.

**DURING ACTIVITY:** Hydrate with an electrolyte-packed sports drink or water every 15-20 minutes throughout play.

**AFTER ACTIVITY:** Drink chocolate milk as a post-workout snack to replenish nutrients lost during exercise.

## PRO TIP

Pair a favorite sports drink with a healthy snack. On busy days, plan ahead for additional hydration opportunities the night before an activity or with breakfast.



# HYDRATION

## BEAT THE HEAT

Young athletes take longer to cool down than adults during strenuous activity, and dehydration can be a real danger.

Dehydration symptoms include feeling faint, headache, fever, intense thirst, not urinating for many hours, nausea, vomiting, breathing faster and deeper than normal, skin numbness or tingling, muscle spasms, and extreme tiredness.

To properly hydrate, drink 16-24 ounces of water before activity, then consume an electrolyte-packed sports drink or water every 15-20 minutes throughout play. Finally, drink chocolate milk as a post-activity snack to replenish lost nutrients.

In addition to hydration, schedule outdoor activities in the morning, before the sun reaches its peak. If that isn't possible, plan plenty of breaks as needed.

As an extra preventive measure, on both sunny and cloudy days, apply sunscreen with

SPF 15 or greater that protects against UVA and UVB rays, 15-30 minutes before exposure. Repeat every two hours if necessary.

### PRO TIP

On hot days wear less equipment and light weight clothing.

Here are the three primary heat problems to look out for:

#### HEAT SYNCOPE

**Symptoms:** Becoming lightheaded or fainting during exercise

**Treatment:** Find a shaded area, lay on the ground and raise your legs. This helps blood get back to the heart.

#### HEAT EXHAUSTION

**Symptoms:** May feel hot, tired, weak or dizzy while sweating profusely

**Treatment:** Remove the athlete from activity and put them in a shaded, cool area. Lay them on the ground and raise their legs about 12 inches. Replenish lost fluids and use ice-wrapped towels to help them cool down.

#### HEAT CRAMPS

**Symptoms:** Painful and localized cramps, usually visible and make muscles feel hard **Treatment:** Rehydrate with water and sports drinks. Use light stretching and ice massages on the cramped muscle to relieve cramping.

*REMEMBER: Always call 911 in case of an emergency or a suspected heat stroke.*

Sources: University of Connecticut, Heads Up Football Heat and Hydration Guidelines



# TIME MANAGEMENT

Mastering time management is a crucial component for successful coaches and athletes. Appropriate balance of responsibilities will help foster holistic athletes on the field while building character traits that directly translate to the classroom and throughout life.

When prioritizing and structuring a team schedule, consider building in time for specific drills and breaks to keep players focused and provide adequate recovery.

## SCHEDULES

### SAMPLE HIGH SCHOOL PRACTICE SCHEDULE I: 7:00

Stretch

- 7:10 Special Teams – Kickoff
- 7:20 Water Break
- 7:25 Indy – Prime Def, Time OFF
- 7:35 7v7
- 7:45 Team On Air
- 7:55 O vs D
- 8:10 Water Break
- 8:20 Kickoff Return
- 8:45 Practice Over

.....

### SAMPLE HIGH SCHOOL PRACTICE SCHEDULE II: 2:45

Stretch

- 3:00 O vs D Competition Drill
- 3:10 Kickoff
- 3:20 Offensive Indy
- 3:35 1v1
- 3:45 RPO
- 3:50 Water Break
- 3:55 Team
- 4:05 Defensive Pursuit
- 4:10 Defensive Indy 7v7
- 4:20 Defensive Team
- 4:30 Kickoff Return
- 4:45





# NFL LEGENDS YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**MARK BRUNELL**  
19-year NFL playing career  
(Packers, Jaguars, Redskins, Saints, Jets)

**NATE BURLESON**  
11-year NFL playing career  
(Vikings, Seahawks, Lions)

**TRENT DILFER**  
14-year NFL playing career  
(Buccaneers, Ravens, Seahawks, Browns, 49ers)

**MAURICE JONES-DREW**  
9-year NFL playing career  
(Jaguars, Raiders)

**WILL MCGINEST**  
15-year NFL playing career  
(Patriots, Browns)

**JORDAN PALMER**  
6-year NFL playing career (Bengals,  
Jaguars, Bears, Titans)

**CHAD PENNINGTON**  
11-year NFL playing career  
(Jets, Dolphins)

**MICHAEL ROBINSON**  
8-year NFL playing career  
(49ers, Seahawks)

**DEION SANDERS**  
14-year NFL playing career  
(Falcons, 49ers, Cowboys, Redskins, Ravens)

**BOBBY TAYLOR**  
10-year NFL playing career  
(Eagles, Seahawks)





DISCOVERING  
THE 5 SHIELDS

# Discovering the 5 Shields

30

Take a guided video tour through the **5 SHIELDS OF THE GAME**. It's an opportunity for parents and coaches to **connect visually** to the NFL Way To Play Playbook.



"I'm sure that had I not been a coach, I would have been some form of a teacher."

Highest All-Time NFL Coaching  
Winning Percentage,  
Super Bowl Champion

**WATCH VIDEO**

# Discovering the 5 Shields

31

Take a guided video tour through the **5 SHIELDS OF THE GAME**. It's an opportunity for parents and coaches to **connect visually** to the NFL Way To Play Playbook.



“Some people try to find things in the game that don’t exist, but football is only two things - blocking and tackling.”

5x

NFL Champion,  
2x Super Bowl Champion

[WATCH VIDEO](#)

# Discovering the 5 Shields

32

Take a guided video tour through the **5 SHIELDS OF THE GAME**. It's an opportunity for parents and coaches to **connect visually** to the NFL Way To Play Playbook.

**DRILL SELECTION**

**“NFL players and coaches are the best in the world at demonstrating excellent technique.”**

**NFL Executive Vice President of Football Operations**

**WATCH VIDEO**

# Discovering the 5 Shields

33

Take a guided video tour through the **5 SHIELDS OF THE GAME**. It's an opportunity for parents and coaches to **connect visually** to the NFL Way To Play Playbook.



“If I had to pick my greatest strength as a football coach, I say it would be innovation.”

Legendary HOF Coach, 2x Super Bowl Champion

[WATCH VIDEO](#)

# Discovering the 5 Shields

34

Take a guided video tour through the **5 SHIELDS OF THE GAME**. It's an opportunity for parents and coaches to **connect visually** to the NFL Way To Play Playbook.



“Do not underestimate the value of just being a kid and having fun win, lose, or draw.”

NFL Vice President of Football Development

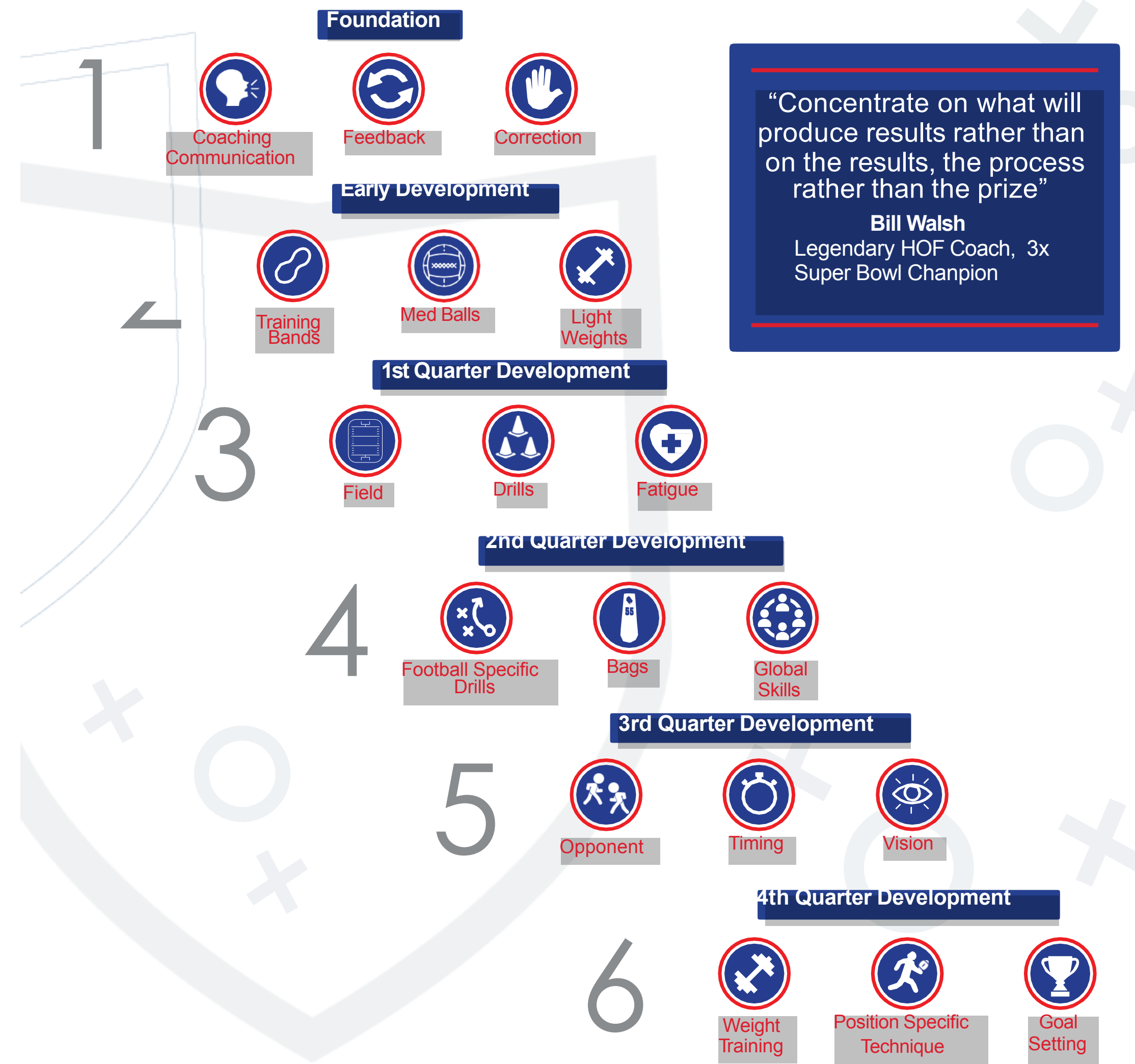
**WATCH VIDEO**



DEVELOPMENTAL  
CONTENT ROADMAP

# Developmental content roadmap

The **Developmental Content Roadmap** allows the coach or parent to view content that's **sequentially organized** around the athlete's stage of football readiness. The Developmental Content Roadmap is a more effective teaching guide when each phase is **completed prior to moving on to the next phase**.



# Developmental content roadmap

The Developmental Content Roadmap allows the coach or parent to view content that's **sequentially organized** around the athlete's stage of football readiness. The Developmental Content Roadmap is a more effective teaching guide when each phase is **completed prior to moving on to the next phase**.

1

## Foundation

Regardless of age, the **Foundation Phase** is where all athletes should begin. It is a sequenced method for teaching and establishing proper Football Ready Posture. This is the foundational skill for all football positions.

### Football Introduction



Coaching  
Communication



Feedback



Correction

### Available Content

FOOTBALL READY  
POSTURE



Before proceeding to the next phase, the athlete should demonstrate a consistent ability to establish Football Ready Posture without correction from the coach.

# Developmental content roadmap

The **Developmental Content Roadmap** allows the coach or parent to view content that's **sequentially organized** around the athlete's stage of football readiness. The Developmental Content Roadmap is a more effective teaching guide when each phase is **completed prior to moving on to the next phase**.

## 2

### Early Development

**The Early Development Phase is designed to challenge Postural Readiness. By introducing more advanced teaching progressions with gradually increased difficulty, the athlete is able to build a higher degree of Postural Readiness.**

#### Football Introduction



Training Bands



Med Balls



Light Weights

#### Available Content

**MED BALL  
FRONT HOLD**



If the athlete is not able to maintain proper posture during these developmental drills, keep the athlete in Early Development until appropriate strength and stability is established.

# Developmental content roadmap

The **Developmental Content Roadmap** allows the coach or parent to view content that's **sequentially organized** around the athlete's stage of football readiness. The Developmental Content Roadmap is a more effective teaching guide when each phase is **completed prior to moving on to the next phase**.

3

## 1st Quarter Development

**1st Quarter Development is where movement begins. The objective is to ensure the athlete demonstrates Posture Maintenance throughout the introduced drills and fatigue.**

### Football Introduction



Field



Drills



Fatigue

### Available Content

FOOTBALL READY  
HOPS



Only proceed to the next phase once all drills are performed consistently without breaking Football Ready Posture. Stop each drill immediately once fatigue effects Postural Maintenance.

# Developmental content roadmap

The **Developmental Content Roadmap** allows the coach or parent to view content that's **sequentially organized** around the athlete's stage of football readiness. The Developmental Content Roadmap is a more effective teaching guide when each phase is **completed prior to moving on to the next phase**.

4

## 2nd Quarter Development

**2nd Quarter Development is when Football Ready Posture is applied to an athlete's specific position.** Building a functional stance is a foundational skill in the game.

### Football Introduction



Football Specific Drills



Bags



Global Skills

### Available Content

LEGENDS TEACHING STANCE



The athlete should establish a position specific stance with the knees bent, back flat, and head up. They must be able to hold their stance without difficulty prior to moving to the next phase.

# Developmental content roadmap

The Developmental Content Roadmap allows the coach or parent to view content that's **sequentially organized** around the athlete's stage of football readiness. The Developmental Content Roadmap is a more effective teaching guide when each phase is **completed prior to moving on to the next phase**.

5

## 3rd Quarter Development

**3rd Quarter Development is focused on improving Posture Behavior in the Space and Speed area of the game. The drills will lean heavily toward building skills that can improve Tackling and Mobility Blocking posture.**

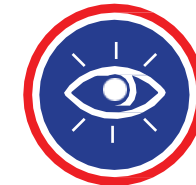
### Football Introduction



Opponent



Timing



Vision

### Available Content

**RUN AND CATCH**

**STOP**

The player should be able to track a target with their eyes running at full speed, while keeping the knees bent, shoulders down, and head up, prior to moving on to the next phase.

# Developmental content roadmap

The Developmental Content Roadmap allows the coach or parent to view content that's **sequentially organized** around the athlete's stage of football readiness. The Developmental Content Roadmap is a more effective teaching guide when each phase is **completed prior to moving on to the next phase**.



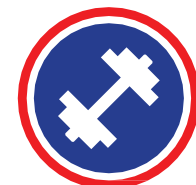
Weight training activities in this phase should be done with a qualified strength professional. All position specific techniques should be under the instruction of a football coach.

6

## 4th Quarter Development

**4th Quarter Development is the most advanced stage in the Developmental Content Roadmap. The teaching includes position specific techniques and training models designed to enhance the on field performance of the athlete and reduce unnecessary risk.**

### Football Introduction



Weight Training



Position Specific  
Technique



Goal Setting

### Available Content

FRONT SQUAT