

**EXPANDED**

©SteveMcLaughlinPhotography.com



## “THE SIX PACK” CONCEPT

### KEEPING LINEBACKER FUNDAMENTALS STRONG ALL SEASON LONG

By Jeff McDonald • Linebackers Coach • Wesleyan University

**D**uring pre-season camp, individual periods tend to be much longer, which gives the position coach ample time to work on the fundamentals that are essential to linebacker play. As coaches, we become spoiled with all of that individual time.

Once pre-season camp ends, so do the long individual periods, as the focus turns to preparation for upcoming opponents. This can drastically shorten the amount of time that you can truly devote to working on fundamentals. But, it is important to continue to work on these fundamentals so the players do not take a step back from the improvements made during the pre-season or during spring practice.

That is why we came up with the drill package we call “The Six Pack.” It is a way for us to hit every major fundamental that is needed to be a successful linebacker. The six major fundamentals that we work on every practice in the Six Pack are: movement, tackling, keys, action passes (play action, boot, and sprint out), block protection and pass rush technique.

The Six Pack is run at the beginning of every individual period every day during the season. We try to spend about a minute on each drill with

time increasing based on the length of the individual period and time frame during the season. The goal is to get six drills done, one covering each of the six linebacker fundamentals, in 5-7 minutes. The linebacker may only get one or two reps on each drill, but it emphasizes that every fundamental is important. I am a big believer that you can get anything coached if you emphasize it enough.

The drills are each given a name so the players put a name with a drill and the coach does not need to continuously re-explain the drill. We try to show good and bad examples of each fundamental so the players see the correct technique before practice. If you have a video system that allows it, splice game clips of the fundamental that the drill is meant to cover being used successfully in a game situation. I have found that the more the players understand the purpose of the drill and how it relates to game situations, the more effort they will give when doing the actual drill.

It is important to make sure the players know what will be included in “The Six Pack” before each practice whether it is covered in a meeting, during stretching or in a pre-practice period. You’ll find that the players

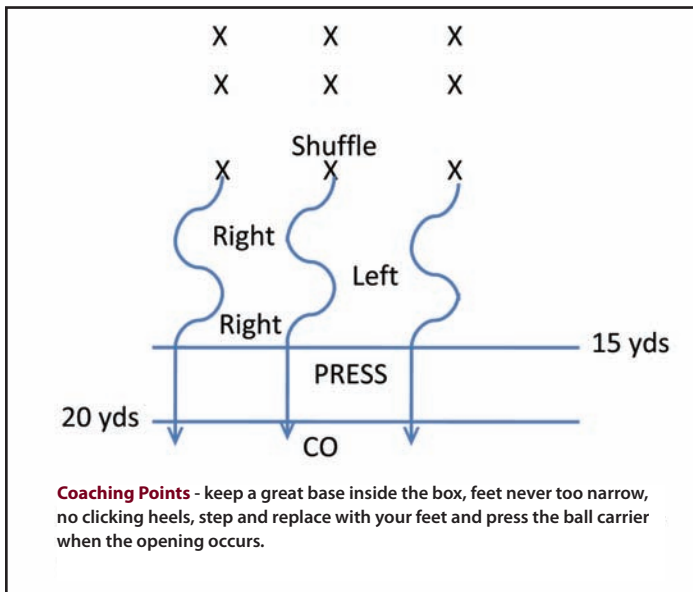


Diagram 1: Downhill Shuffle Drill

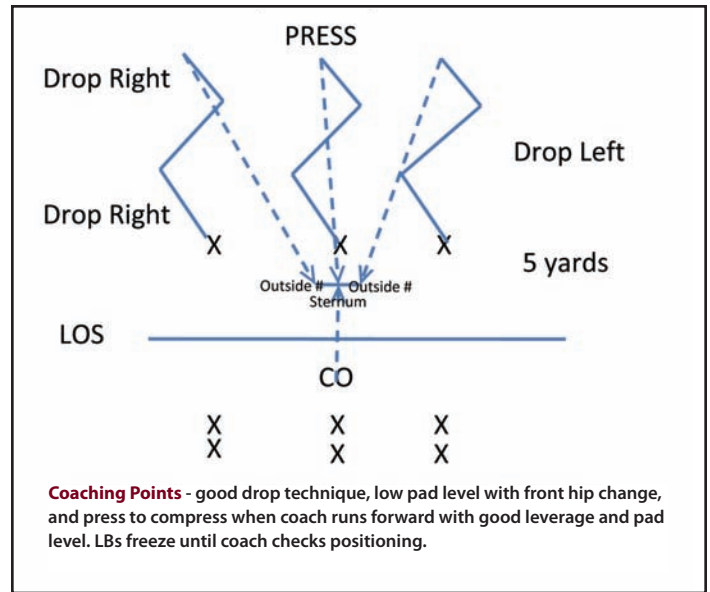


Diagram 2: Swoop to Compress Drill

will come to you to find out “What’s in The Six Pack for today?”

We try to film the Six Pack in practice every day. This will make sure the players understand they are accountable for their effort and technique during that period.

You can change the drills to incorporate a number of other necessary fundamentals to keep it from getting boring and repetitive. Some weeks during the season we may work one fundamental more than another if we feel we are struggling in that particular area.

Listed below is an example of a “Six Pack” of drills that we did during a practice this past season to make sure we hit each of the six fundamentals that are key to being a great linebacker.

**1. To Work the LB Movement Fundamentals** – The linebackers need to be able to shuffle laterally and downhill while avoiding a narrow base. One drill we use in the Six Pack on a regular basis is DOWNHILL SHUFFLE (See Diagram 1). In this drill, we emphasize keeping a great base inside the box, feet never too narrow, no clicking heels, step and replace with your feet. The linebackers line up facing the coach with about 20 yards between them. On the command, they start with a downhill shuffle to the right or left depending on the direction the coach gives them. Once they have gone 15 yards, the PRESS command is given and they sprint through the finish. At times we will change the movement drill to work the alley run or the lateral shuffle.

**2. To Work LB Tackling Fundamentals** – We spend a lot of time on tackling in space. It is important that the linebackers not only understand how to tackle properly but understand where their help is so they can take the proper leverage. One drill we use in the Six Pack to teach this fundamental is SWOOP TO COMPRESS (See Diagram 2). In this drill, we have three linebackers facing the coach. The coach then directs them to open at a 45-degree angle in a drop situation. They move right,

then left, then right. At that point, the coach runs straight ahead for 5 yards as linebackers react, coming to him as if he is the ball carrier. The three LBs compress on the coach, one head up, one on each number, with their inside foot up.

**3. To Work LB Key Fundamentals** – For this fundamental, we do a quick drill on keys, specifically for direction of running back and guard pulls. We call it ALERTS (See Diagram 3) and the second group of LBs align as two guards and a running back. The coach stands behind the defense and directs the guards and running back. Stress whatever the keys are for your LBs. For us, we use this drill to recognize guard pulls and pass sets. Those are the two alerts that will take us off the RB’s path. Once the first group gets to see pulls in either direction and the pass, then the two groups switch from offense to defense. This is also a good time to recheck stances and initial steps.



©SteveMcLaughlinPhotography.com

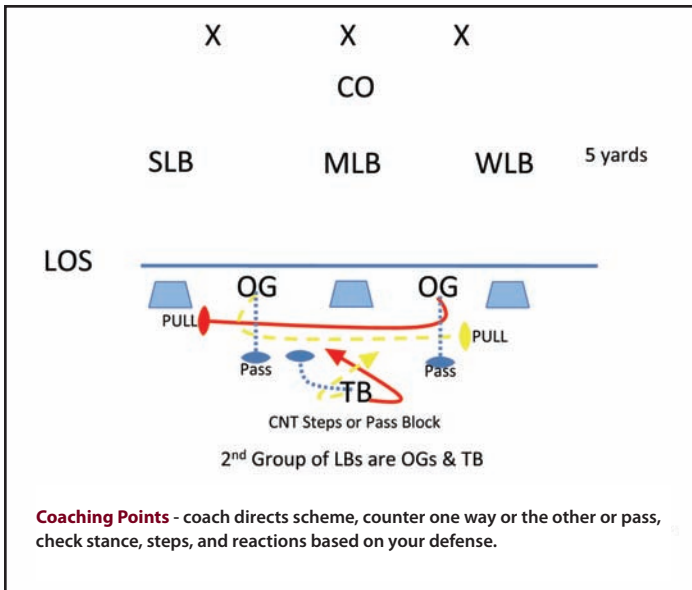


Diagram 3: Alerts Drill

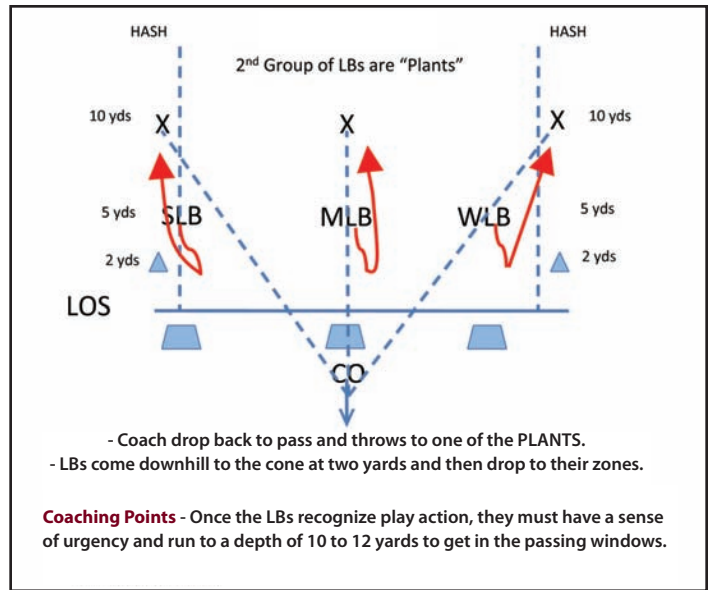


Diagram 4: Action Drill

**4. To Work on LB Action Pass Fundamentals** – Here we are working on the redirect and sense of urgency needed vs. any action pass. With our ACTION DRILL (See Diagram 4) we set cones at two yards from the LOS and the second group of linebackers are the “plants.” They are aligned with one in the middle of the field and one yard outside each hash at 10 yards. The coach plays QB and drops back to pass to start the drill.

LBs run to the cones set at two yards (to simulate being caught in a run fake), then redirect to their drops. The coach then throws to one of the “plants” at the 10 yard depth. The LBs must have a great sense of urgency to get depth and then play the ball. A quick drill to do that will reinforce the importance of getting depth once play action is recognized. You can also use the same concept to work vs. a boot or sprint-out pass.

**Westside Barbell Reverse Hyper**

**LEVEREDGE Trap Shrug/Lunge/Deadlift**

**Core Spider**

**Ultimate Preacher Curl**

**PRO SERIES Push/Pull Power Sled**

**PERFORMANCE SERIES Half Rack**

Visit [LegendFitness.com](http://LegendFitness.com) to learn more. For direct sales, call toll free at 866-7LEGEND.

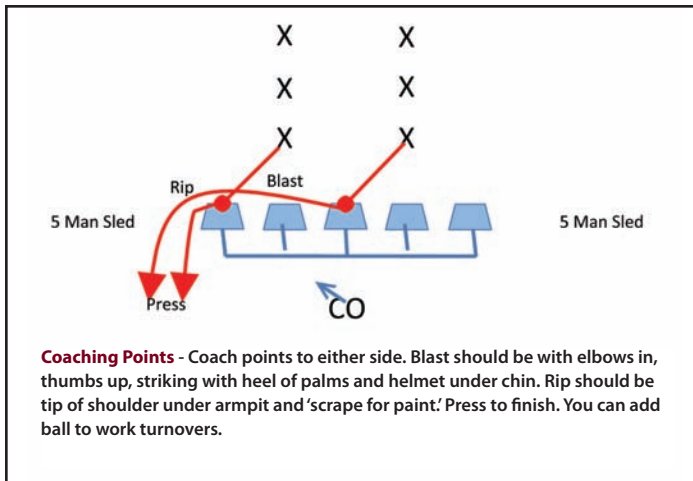


Diagram 5: Blast and Shed Drill

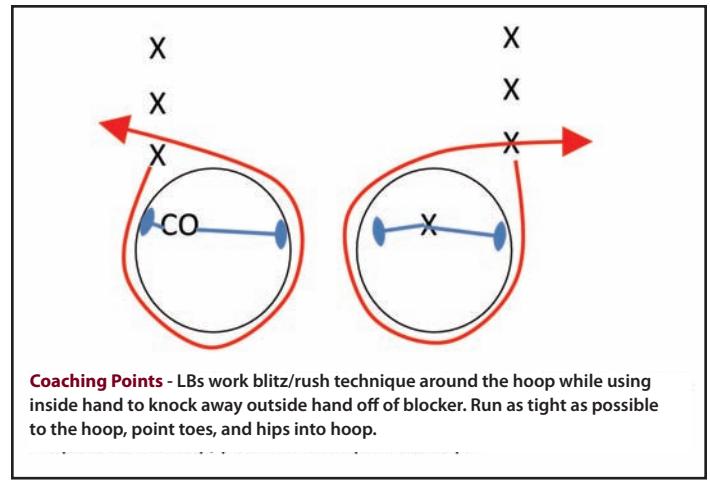


Diagram 6: Hoops and Hands Drill

**5. To Work LB Block Protection Fundamentals** – We work on taking on blocks with our hands, using our rip skills and low blocks. One of the drills we will use to work this fundamental in the Six Pack is called BLAST AND SHED (See Diagram 5). The LBs align over the even numbered bags on the 5-man sled at three yards deep. The coach stands behind the sled and gives a quick point to the right or left. The LBs come downhill and strike using the shiver technique and then return to the initial position. The coach points again and the LBs repeat the same drill. On the third and final rep, the LBs strike the bag with a shiver in the

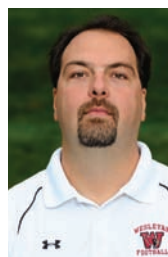
direction the coach points then uses their rip technique on the final bag as they work off the sled. The coaching points for the shiver would be helmet under the chin, elbows in, thumbs up, striking with the heel of their palms, coming out of their cleats and through the blocker to gain extension. Footwork is also stressed as their base should never be too narrow in the drill.

**6. To Work LB Pass Rush Fundamentals** – In our defensive scheme we blitz our LBs often. Therefore, it is important that we work on pass rush technique with them, whether it is coming off an edge or through an inside gap. A quick drill is our HOOPS AND HANDS (See Diagram 6) drill. We will use a hoop and have the LBs run the hoop. As they are running the hoop, the coach will stand in the middle of the circle with a shield. The coach will use the shield to replicate the arm of the OL, which the LB must continue to knock away with his inside arm. We make the coaching point on a regular basis that in order to rush the edge, we must eliminate the arm that protects the blocker's shoulder.



The drills are set up before practice. Either in a meeting or during stretch time, I make the players aware of the six pack for the day and the tempo that is expected. My comment to the group at the end of the meeting or right before practice would be something like, "Remember in the six pack today we are doing Downhill Shuffle to Swoop to Compress to Alerts to the Action Drill to Blast and Shed and finish with Hoops and Hands. Then, once the individual period starts, I will yell out the name of each drill and make the players accountable for knowing the drill and getting aligned to start the drill."

I hope you found this article helpful in keeping up your player's fundamentals during the season using the Six Pack concept. ♦



**About the Author:** Jeff McDonald enters his third season on the staff of Wesleyan University this fall as both linebackers and special teams coach. He previously was the defensive coordinator for Towson University. McDonald coached defensive ends and inside linebackers at Yale (2002-2007) and also coached at Central Connecticut State, New Hampshire and Quincy University.