

Last Stand: Goal Line Defense



Dennis McCulloch

Head Coach

**Valley City State
University**

Valley City, ND



Gregg Horner

**Defensive
Coordinator**

On behalf of Valley City State University and the Vikings' defensive staff, I would like to thank the AFCA for the opportunity to contribute to the *Summer Manual*. A significant part of our success here at VCSU has been our scoring defense. This is my eighth season at VCSU, my fifth as head football coach, and I have seen a direct relationship between the points given up on defense and our success on the football field. In 1996 we won a conference championship while leading the league in scoring defense averaging nine points per game.

The past two seasons in the DAC-10 we have lost two games, won a conference championship and have been to the national playoffs twice. We led our league in scoring defense both of these seasons with 16 ppg and 13 ppg respectively. There is no other stat that has had such a direct effect on our success. We try to instill the attitude that no matter how big a play the offense has produced, if they do not score, we can still be successful. I realize this probably comes as no great revelation, but we coach our players not to ride the wave of emotions that big plays bring. The only thing that matters is that the opponent did not score. We have all witnessed offenses hit big plays down to the goal line and watched the defense give up and make it look easy for the offense to score. I want our kids to believe that if the team isn't in the end zone, they have not accomplished a thing. The only true big play for the offense is a touchdown, nothing else matters.

Goal line defense is our last stand and we are going to sell out to make a big play to stop the offense. Gregg Horner, our defensive coordinator, has done a great job of coming up with a scheme that takes on our philosophy. Our kids get excited about playing "Buffalo" — our nine-man front for the goal line. Sending in this team is not a negative; it is the next step in stopping the offense. I hope that you can take something from Coach Horner's goal line package to help you next season.

Gregg Horner, Defensive Coordinator

Goal Line Philosophy

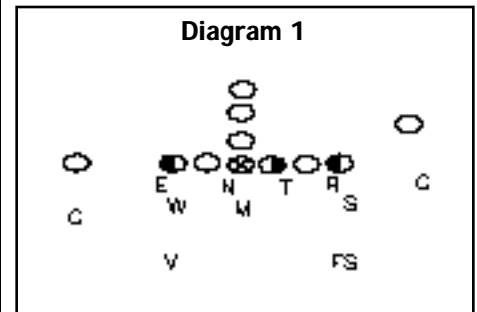
Our philosophy on the goal line (three yards and in) has evolved from a basic slant and blitz from our base front concept to what we now call our Buffalo package. We felt that we were spending far too much time game planning for other teams' jumbo

(two runningbacks and two or three tight ends) packages. As we reviewed our goal line situations, we found that we were not as successful as we needed to be. We realized that we were trying to take it all away from the offense. In doing so, we had made ourselves vulnerable, specifically to the run.

Our Buffalo package is a nine-man front that we believe puts pressure on the offense to make decisions. Our philosophy on the goal line vs. jumbo is now very simple: take away the run and rally to everything else.

Base Alignment

Our base defense is a basic 4-3 alignment.



Personnel

Personnel changes from base defense to goal line defense include subbing a defensive end (X) for our free safety. This will enable us to get into the nine-man front. We will bring in larger defensive linemen in this package, with our largest defensive linemen assigned to the nose and tackle positions.

Buffalo Front

This front is predicated on our defensive linemen staying low and not giving ground. They should not slant; we do not want to create any natural creases for the offense. They are taught a bear crawl technique to stay low and attack up the field.

The nose and tackle will align in one techniques on the center. They are in four-point stances and crowding the football. They will align almost shoulder to shoulder. They will explode off the snap of the ball and get vertical by driving through the hip joint of the center. Their primary responsibility is to take two for three; they should occupy the center and offensive guards. They cannot slant and must keep from being washed.

The end and the rush will align in five techniques on the offensive tackle. They are also in four-point stances and crowding the football. At the snap, they should



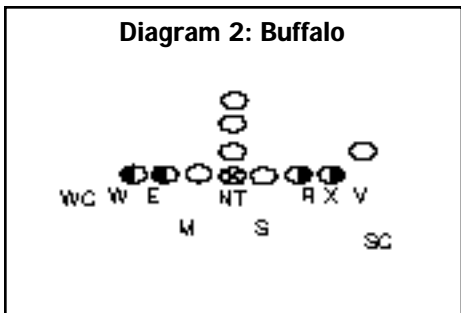
explode straight up the field through the outside hip joint of the offensive tackle. It is very important that they do not get washed; they must penetrate and get vertical.

The Will and X are aligned in seven techniques on the tight end. They are in two-point stances and should crowd the ball. At the snap they will attack their tight end keeping leverage on the D gap. They will not allow a free release by the tight end. Will and X are bounce players and will spill everything. If play goes away, they will play the quarterback boot.

Mike and Sam will align in three techniques on the offensive guard with their heels at five yards depth regardless of how close the ball is to the goal line. We believe that the depth of Mike and Sam allows them to see things better, make plays sideline to sideline, and most importantly run downhill with force. Their reads will be predetermined by game plan. Mike and Sam are the playmakers in this front. They are "run first" players who should be unblocked. They will arrive with force filling "green" (gaps) and spilling everything.

The Viking (strong safety) will align on the line of scrimmage in a two-point stance. He will split the stance of the wing. If he gets run to him, he will attack the wing and penetrate. If he gets run away, he will think pass first and check the tight end before becoming a fold player for cutback.

The weak corner aligns on the line of scrimmage two and a half yards outside the tight end. He reads through the tight end to the near back and is weak side run support. The strong corner will align 2x4 on the wing. He will key the wing to near back. He is strong side run support.



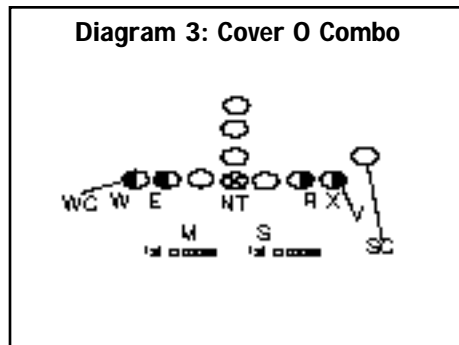
Cover O Combo

This is the man coverage we play with our Buffalo package. We are playing the run first in Buffalo, but we will teach the players to react quickly to play any pass. We know that the ball will need to come out in a hurry

because of the pressure from the front.

Both corners are assigned the No. 1 receiver to their side. If we get an offensive formation with a receiver split, the strong corner will play hard man-to-man defense on him. The weak corner will attack the No. 1 receiver to his side. He is a run penetrator first and will react to any pass.

The Viking will have the first release to the flat man-to-man. He must work hard to get underneath this receiver. The Sam will not allow anyone to cross. He will jump the first inside release to his side and play him man-to-man. Mike has the weak back or first crosser to his side man-to-man.



Buffalo Tuff

Tuff is a front change up to our Buffalo package. We will use this defense if the ball is very tight to the goal line, or we believe the other team to be more of a "between-the-tackles" type of a running team in goal line situations. The responsibilities in this front do not change dramatically, but we feel it gives the offense a different look and gives us a heavier presence versus inside run.

The rush and the end move from a five technique to a 4I technique. They remain in four-point stances and crowd the football as before. Their aiming point is now the inside hip joint of the offensive tackle. Again, it is very important that they do not slant or get washed. If they feel themselves being moved, they must hit the ground and do everything they can to make a pile.

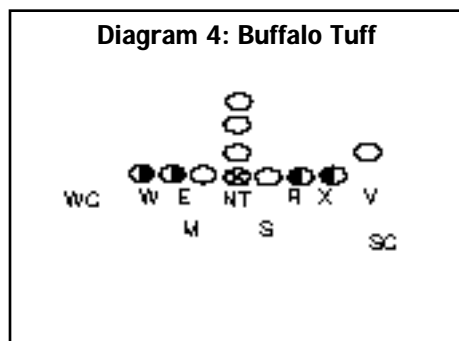


Diagram 4: Buffalo Tuff

Will and X move inside to 6I techniques and will play heavy on the tight ends maintaining C-gap leverage. They will remain in two-point stances and attack up the field through the tight end. They should not give ground or be forced down inside. They are still be responsible for boot on play away and will continue to spill everything on play to them.

Buffalo Tuff Thunder

This is our base blitz from our goal line package. We will run it out of the Buffalo Tuff Front. The Viking and the weak corner will blitz off the outside. If there is a wing, the Viking will split the tight end and wing with his blitz. Both blitzers should remain tight and spill anything to them. Unless a check is made, this is a run blitz, and they do not have boot responsibility. This is an all out blitz, and we will give up the quarterback on boot.

This blitz forces a subtle changeup to O combo coverage. Will and X will now have coverage responsibilities. They will be man-to-man on the tight end to their side. Thunder must be called off if there is ever a split receiver to the weak side.

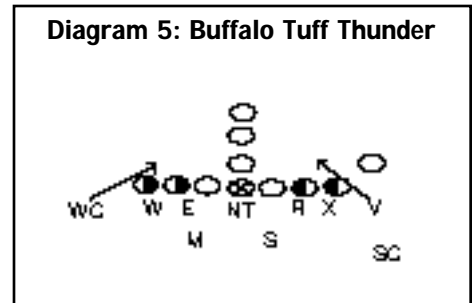


Diagram 5: Buffalo Tuff Thunder

Final Thoughts

We believe that another significant key to playing good defense on the goal line is to tackle high. We teach and practice proper goal line tackling. We work on staying high and keeping the feet moving.

As Coach McCulloch stated earlier, the most important part of playing good defense on the goal line is to develop the proper attitude in goal line situations. If the offense is on the one-yard line, they have not scored. Make your opponent take another snap. Each snap is another opportunity for us. We make ourselves smarter, and we get luckier by making them take more snaps.

On behalf our staff, we would like to again thank the AFCA for this opportunity. Please let us know if we can help you in any way. We wish you continued success this fall.