

CHALK TALK | OFFENSE

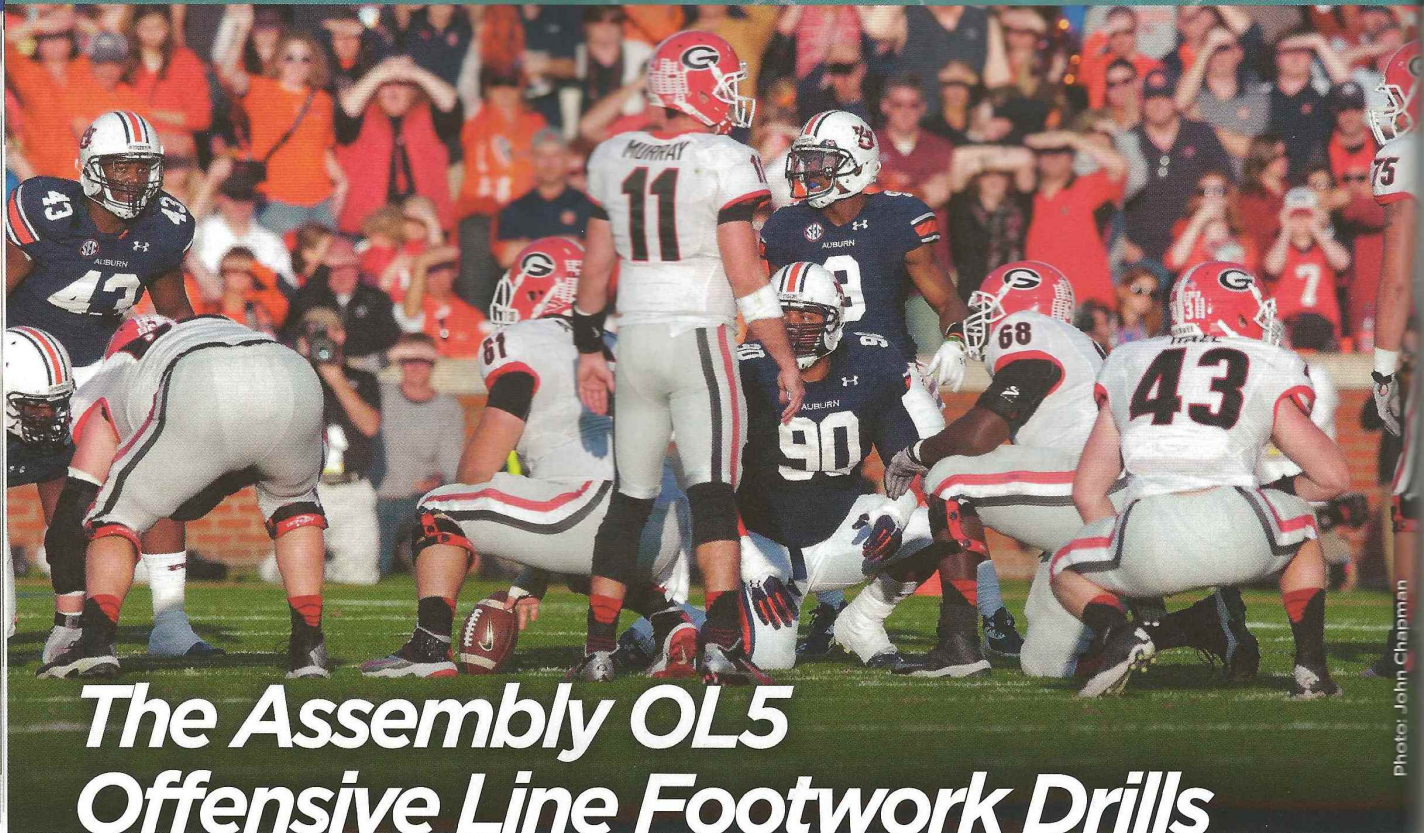


Photo: John Chapman

The Assembly OL5 Offensive Line Footwork Drills

By Tony Johnson, Offensive Line Coach, Duncanville (Texas) High School

The Assembly OL5 is built around servicing a single demographic: the offensive lineman. Every single aspect of our program's design and implementation serves the sole purpose of developing a better offensive lineman.

Everybody wants to coach the all-star offensive lineman. Unfortunately, coaches do not always have an all-star offensive lineman. Coaches must take that lineman in high school and make him the best lineman possible.

The skill set required to play this position at a high level is the exact opposite of what you are born to do. Offensive line is the only position that does not return to a normal body position during a play.

Learned Skills

There are too many drills to list in this article, but what we do for players is give them the necessary tools to be successful on the field. We allow them to focus on muscle memory and developing the hands, feet and body composition to succeed.

There are many types of systems and blocking schemes out there. Still, there are some non-negotiable drills that all offensive line coaches ought to be teaching and doing to make their offensive linemen better.

It's not how many different blocks your team uses; it's how well they execute each step of each particular block. Proper execution comes from truly understanding and feeling confident with technique.

There isn't any magic pill out there for offensive linemen. I cannot make you 6'5" and 300 pounds, but I can teach the correct skills and drills to develop better offensive linemen at all levels.

Fundamentals can be very different depending on the schemes you run. However, in both run and pass blocking, coaches need a foundation from which to build the more specific fundamentals necessary to execute schemes.

Technique wins more often than not. The offensive lineman has the

advantage over the defense because he knows the play and the snap count. It's like being up 2-0 on a guy in a game played to 3.

So why give away your two-point advantage with terrible technique?

The Five Steps

The five steps and the drills that go into developing them are the keys to success. They are the foundation. All players leave our program knowing the five steps and the essential drills that make those steps become second nature in the heat of battle.

The five steps include, in order:

1. Feet
2. Fire
3. Fit
4. Fight
5. Finish

The Assembly OL5 takes linemen through a series of drills to achieve the maximum readiness to be great at those unique steps. Linemen can't just

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do them one day and then expect to be great. The drills must be worked on year round. Muscle memory building is never complete.

Proper Stance

Linemen must start with a great stance. The stance is the key to a quick "get off" on both run or pass. A proper stance is the foundation from which a good offensive lineman must operate.

It's vital that the weight of the lineman is evenly distributed so he remains balanced. Placing too much weight forward makes it hard to pass-block. Too much weight behind and the offensive linemen will not get off fast enough, and will hinder the angles of success for a good block.

The head must be bowed back and the lineman should be looking up through his eyebrows.

We start on the first day by talking about the stance and the start. Linemen must place their feet shoulder-width apart. Start with a toe-to-instep relationship. If the lineman is in a right-handed stance, he must have his right toe intersect his left instep. Point the toes outward slightly.

The lineman bends down like he is getting into a catcher's stance. He puts

his right hand down in front of him. There should be very little air under his feet, and all five fingers must be in the ground.

The off-hand must cup the knee. This allows for the hands to load when the first step is taken. It also allows linemen to punch the second foot in the ground and assure that both hands will hit at the same time, allowing the hips to get through on the block.

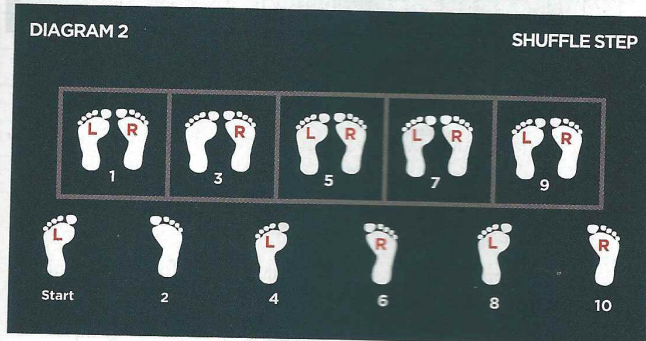
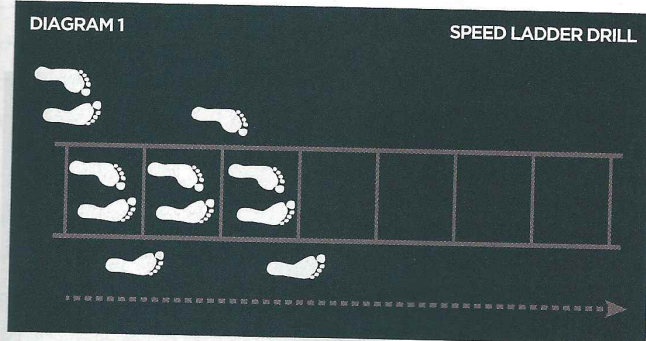
Working The Steps

After teaching the stance, we start working on the steps. To properly get the stance, run the linemen through a series of drills first. In most of these drills, offensive linemen will operate out of the stance we have taught.

To get the feet going, it helps to work on the Speed Ladder Drill (See Diagram 1). Do "One foot in each square," "Duck walks," and "Side To Sides" as well as the "Shuffle Step," shown in Diagram 2.

Boards And Chutes

After the Speed Ladder, linemen should work the boards and chutes (Diagram 3). This allows them to work on the steps necessary to achieve successful run and pass schemes.



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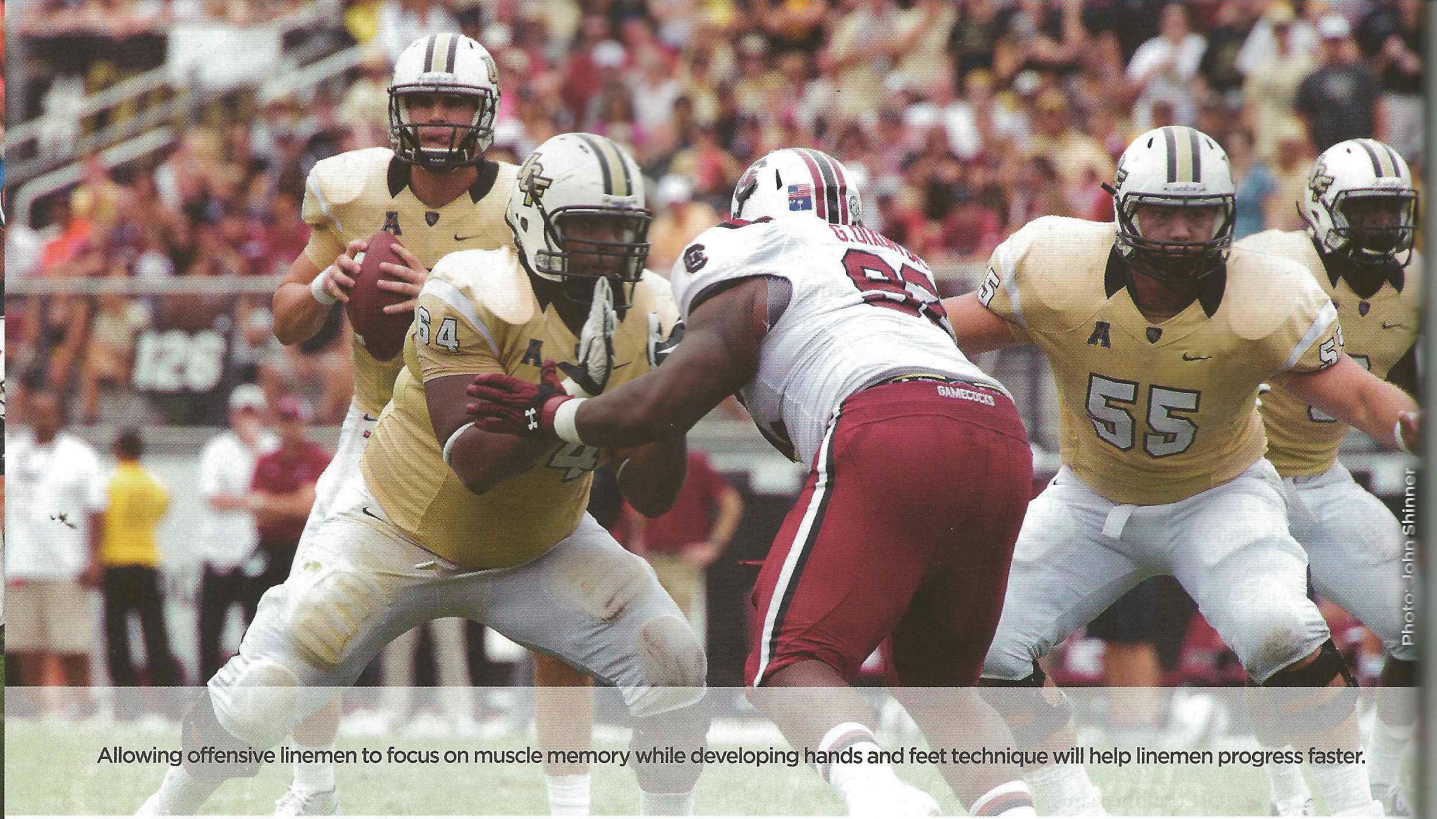


Photo: John Shimmer

Allowing offensive linemen to focus on muscle memory while developing hands and feet technique will help linemen progress faster.

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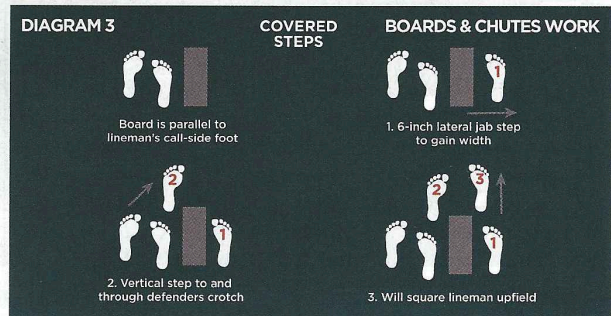
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Coaches can use the boards to work on the lead step, the drop-and-pop step and the bucket step.

I will also take the single man chutes and put one on each board to make sure our offensive linemen are keeping proper pad level through each step. I have also at times used ankle and wrist cuffs to keep the feet apart and the hands and wrists together.



Some other types of steps linemen must work on with the boards are the “down block” and “pull block.” The boards teach linemen to take the proper steps and keep the necessary width of the feet through the entire block. Getting the feet too narrow is not conducive to creating the perfect block.

Bags And Drills

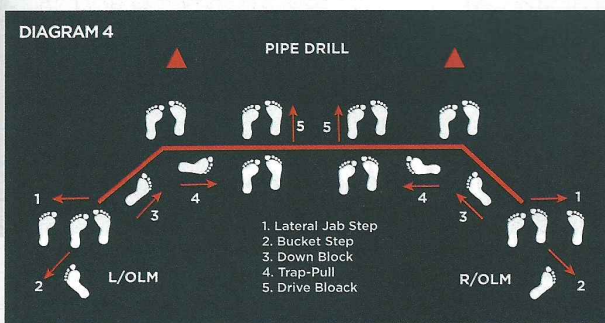
It's important to use flat-back bags to do footwork drills. By running linemen through a series of bag drills, they will develop a different skill set than if they were using ropes.

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It's not a bad idea to paint a series of grids on the field as well so each lineman can work on specific steps within their grid square.

They can pass-set, post-set and take run-game steps, and coaches can get a good view of the offensive linemen because they are lined up systematically. Coaches can even place defensive linemen in each square for the offensive linemen to get a read.

To wrap up the run game steps required for great offensive line play, coaches can run the Pipe Drill. The Pipe Drill allows coaches to shout rapid, specific steps that two down-offensive-linemen need to perform. This drill makes the linemen think quickly based on the coach's call and allows them to put into practice getting down in their stance and performing the step quickly. (Diagram 4)



The last piece to warming up the feet for practice and to assure that the linemen are improving is to work on pass protection stance and steps. Coaches must find balance, rather than simple working run game fundamentals all day.

Take a few minutes to do a duck demeanor drill which involves the pass set and the duck walk. It gets the guys focused and gets their legs burning in a good way.

Finally, coaches should take the offensive linemen through the Pass Set and Post Reset Drill. (Diagram 5)



The drill allows coaches to teach a few points about the eyes, hips and proper angles. It allows the feet to adjust to moving backward. Your linemen should immediately understand if they are not using good technique. AFCA

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