



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

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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

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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

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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





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POSTURE

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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.

BIOMECHANICS OF LOWERING THE HEAD



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





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SPACE AND SPEED

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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

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Pass Set

Kick-Out Blocks

2nd Level Blocking

Trap Blocks

Blitz Pick Ups

Screens

DEFENSE

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Tackling

Defeating a Block

Rushing the Passer

IN LINE BLOCKS

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Base Blocking

Reach

Backside Cutoff

Combination Block



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DRILL SELECTION

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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

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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 11 on 11 team 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



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LANGUAGE

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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.

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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

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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-butt and Press

Emphasis on “Hat Placement”

Earhole

Drive Helmet Through Target

Bite the Ball

Screws on Screws
Helmet Screws

Helmet to Chin Relationship



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BEST PRACTICES

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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.



NUTRITION

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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.

PRO TIP

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

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 play 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

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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

HYDRATION

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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

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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. A proper balance of responsibilities will help foster a holistic athlete on the field while building characteristics 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

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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

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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
- 4:20 7v7
- 4:30 Defensive Team
- 4:45 Kickoff Return



NFL LEGENDS YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MARK BRUNELL

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

NATE BURLESON

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