

26. AREAS OF COVERAGE

The following diagrams serve to illustrate the principles described in the previous chapters.

They are of two main types:

- static diagrams show the areas of responsibility of each of the officials – in other words which official has the primary duty to watch the ball and the ball carrier when it/he is in that area;
- the example play diagrams show the positions of the officials and the key players at various points in time as the play develops.

The areas of responsibility shown are those at the start of the play. As the play develops, these change, usually so that the nearest official is concentrating on the ball carrier and the other officials on the action around him.

In each diagram, yard lines across the field are drawn at five yard intervals.

26.1 – Basic free kick areas of responsibility

Figure A: The 8 basic free kick positions

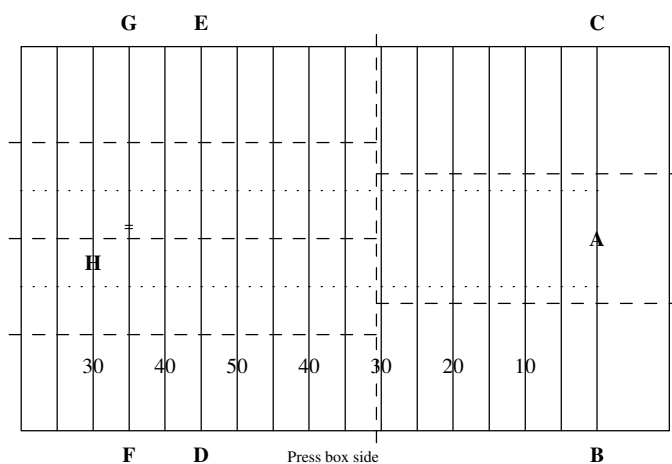


Figure B: 4-man crew (normal positions)

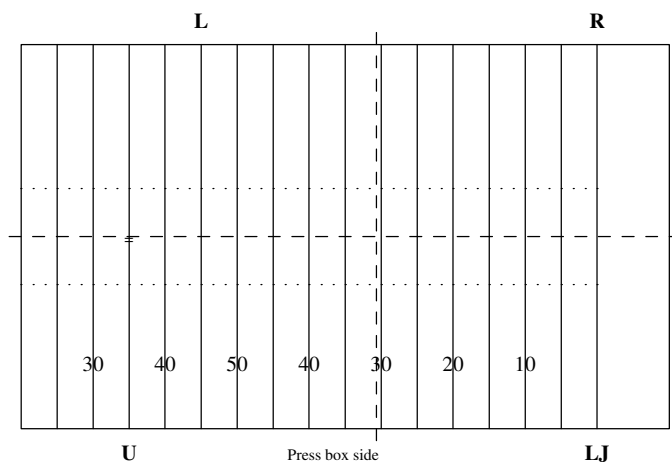


Figure C: 4-man crew (onside-kick positions)

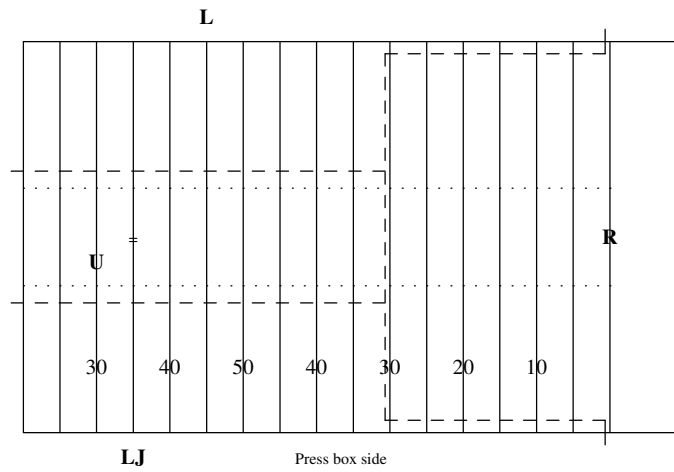


Figure D: 5-man crew

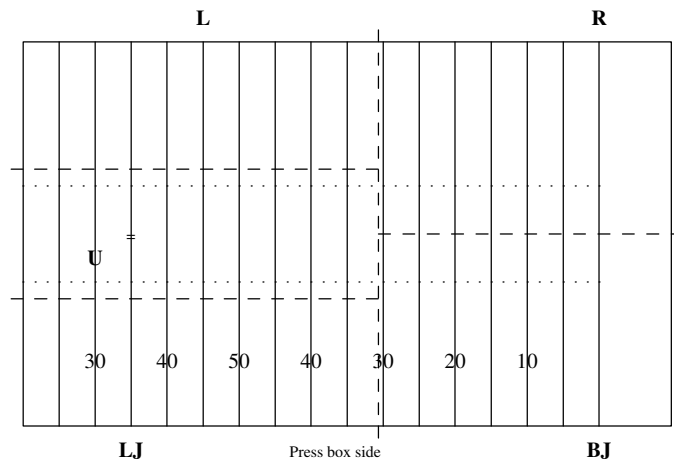


Figure E: 5-man crew (onside-kick positions)

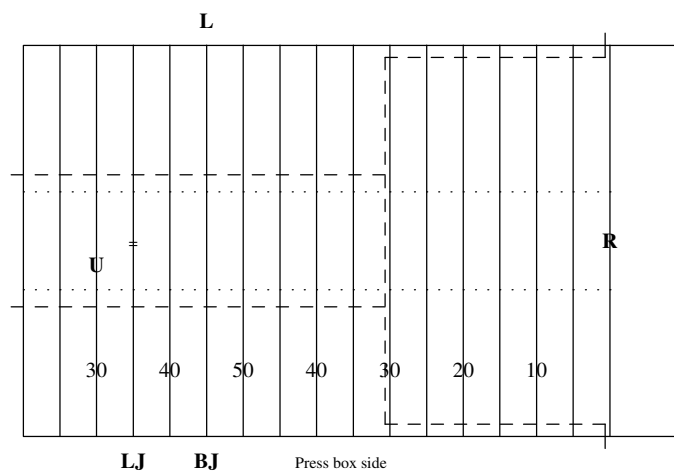


Figure F: 6-man crew

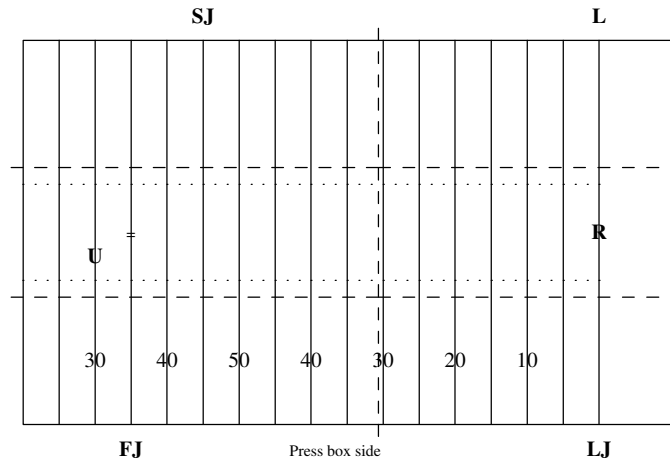


Figure G: 6-man crew (onside-kick positions)

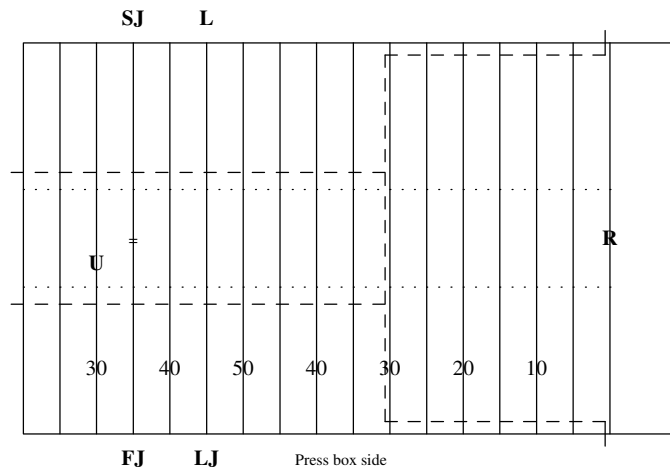


Figure H: 7-man crew

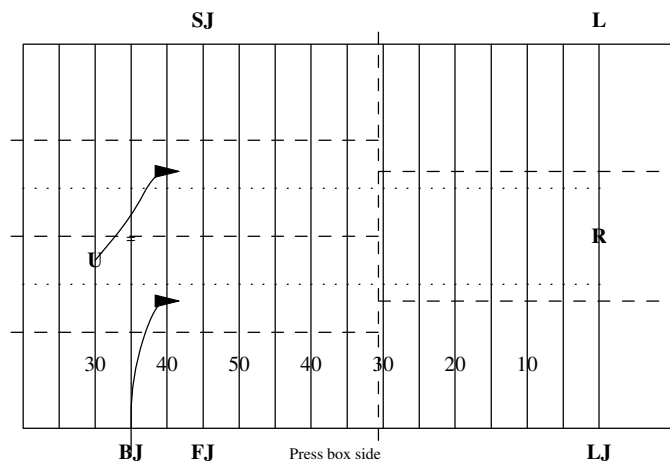


Figure I: 7-man crew (onside-kick positions)

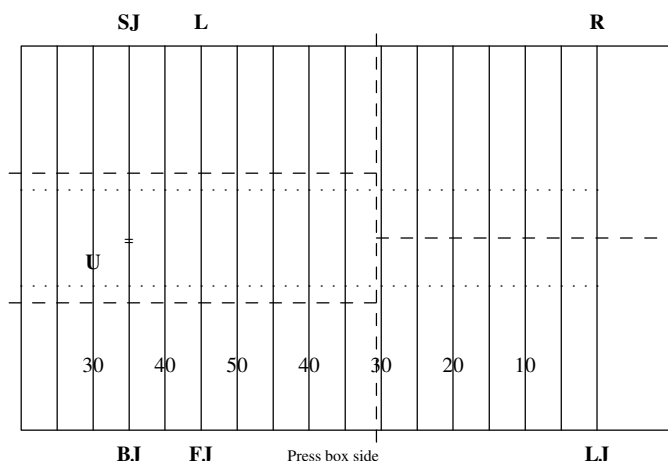
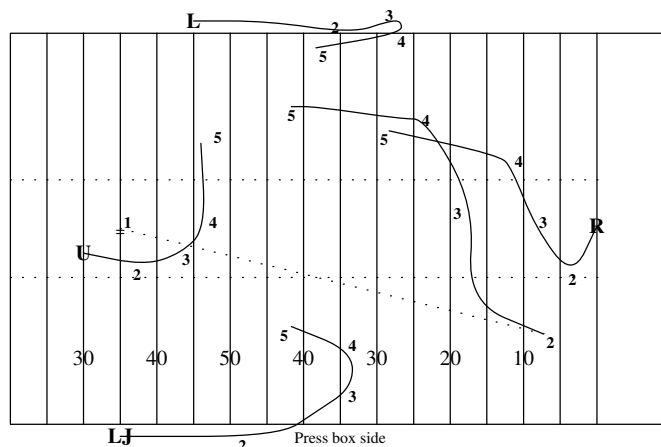
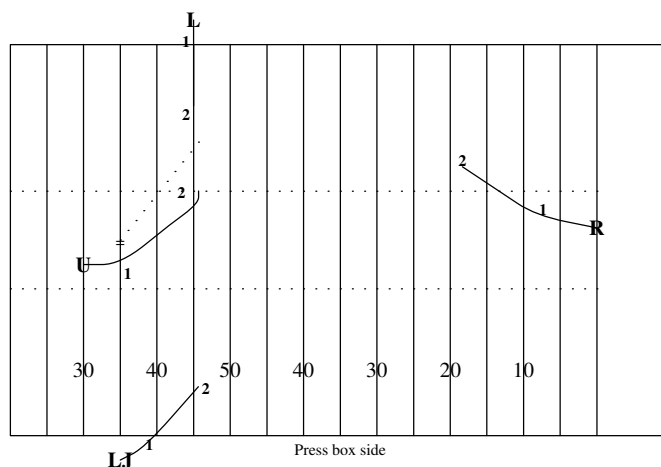


Figure J: Example play (4-man crew, onside-kick positions) free kick deep to press box side returned across field"



As the ball is kicked off (1) the officials are in their initial positions. While the ball is in flight the officials begin to move to cover their areas of responsibility. The ball is descending in the Referee's area so he watches the potential receivers for fair catch signals. The other officials watch the blocks by and against the players moving downfield and for any illegal wedge forming in front of the returner. The Referee observes the catch of the kick (2) and watches the returner while he is in his area. As the returner runs across the field (3), the officials adjust their positions to keep the play boxed in. The Linesman and Umpire observe lead blocks on the return until the ball carrier moves into the Linesman's area of coverage (4). At this point the Linesman takes the ball until the ball carrier is tackled (5) while the Referee switches to watching action around the ball carrier. The Line Judge maintains a wide view of the field.

Figure K: Example play (4-man crew, onside-kick positions) short kick to Linesman's side of the field



When the officials see that the ball has been kicked short (1), the Linesman, Umpire and Line Judge all move into a position to see the ball and action around it. The Referee moves upfield observing peripheral action. When the kick is recovered (2), the Linesman and Umpire will move rapidly to the dead-ball spot to be prepared to rule on possession. The Referee and Line Judge continue to monitor action around and away from the ball.

26.2 – Basic scrimmage down areas of responsibility

Figure A: 4-man crew

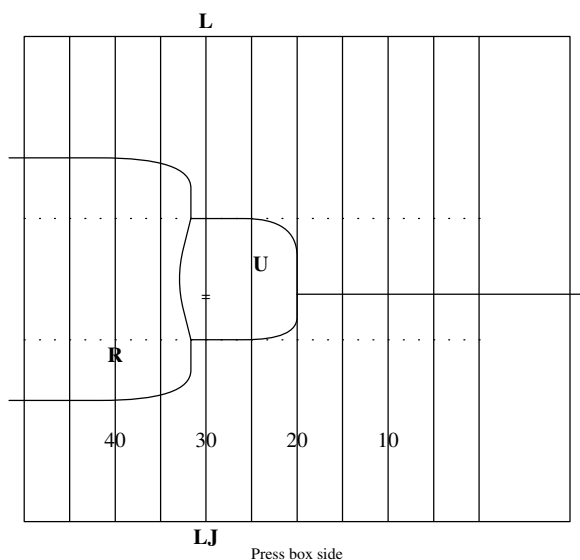


Figure B: 5-man crew

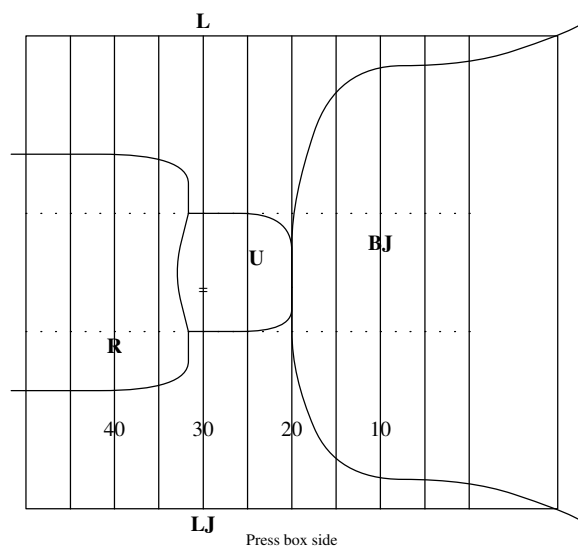
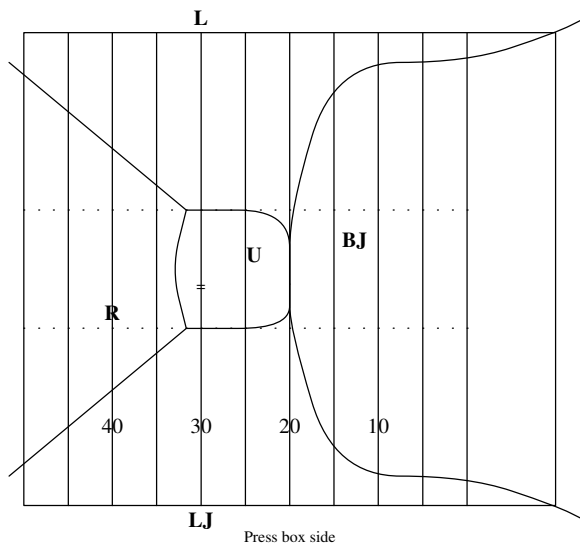


Figure C: 5-man crew (pass play coverage zones)



Officials have **primary** coverage of any or all receivers in their area (as shown in the diagram left), but (with the exception of the Referee, and on long passes, the Umpire) are expected to provide secondary coverage of the area around the end of any forward pass.

Figure D: 6-man crew

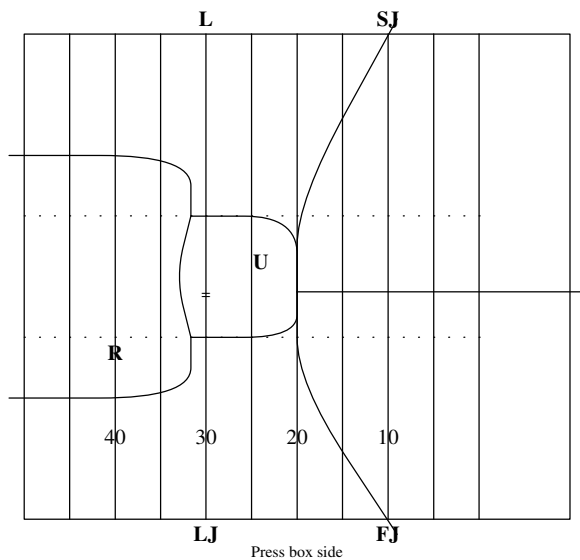


Figure E: 7-man crew

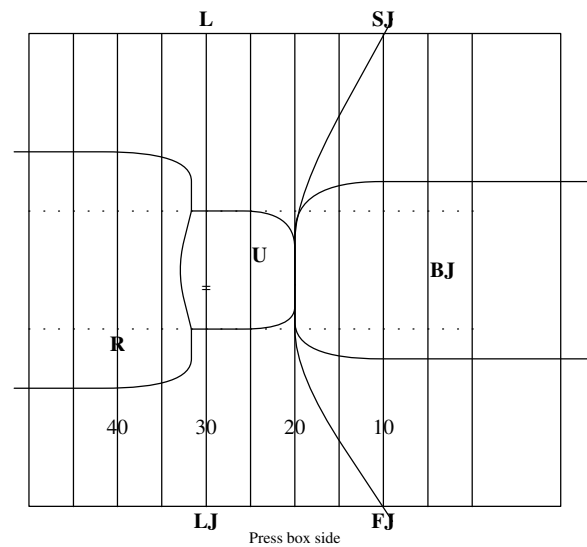
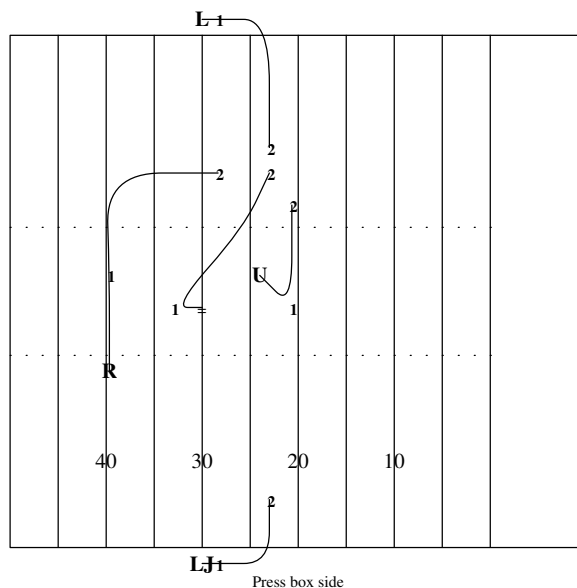
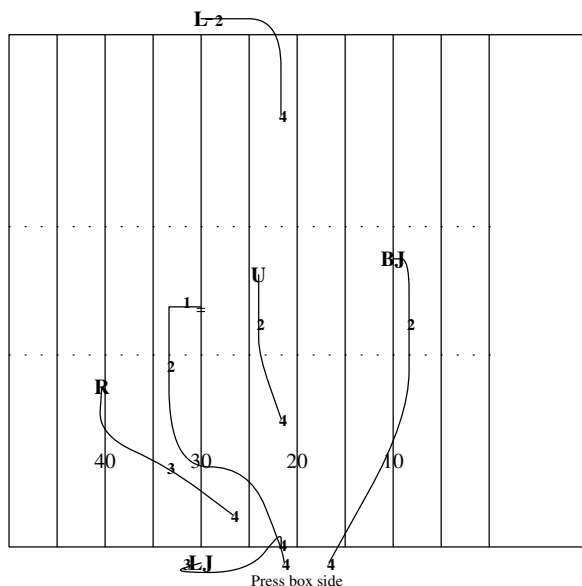


Figure F: Example play (4-man crew) run up the middle of the field



As the play develops (1), the Umpire moves laterally to stay away from the hole at the point of attack. As the ball carrier approaches the neutral zone, the Linesman takes over responsibility for him and moves to the dead-ball spot when he is tackled (2) to mark the forward progress. The Umpire and Referee observe action ahead of and around the ball carrier.

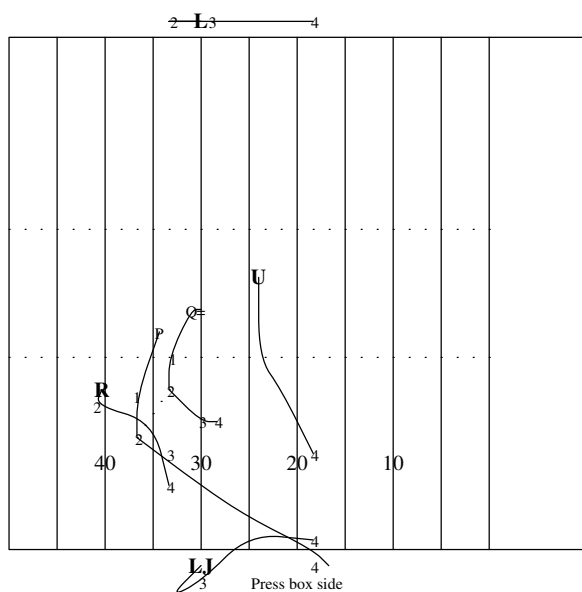
Figure G: Example play (5-man crew) sweep to Line Judge's side of the field



At the snap (1) the officials read their keys to determine what the play is. Once it is determined to which side of the field the play is being run (2), the Line Judge makes sure he is well out of the way and the Back Judge moves across the field to observe lead blocks. The Umpire turns and watches the play from the inside. When the ball carrier turns up field (3), responsibility for him passes from the Referee to the Line Judge. The Referee switches to watching blocks around the ball carrier while the Line Judge follows the ball carrier up the sideline. When the ball carrier goes out of bounds (4), the Line Judge marks the dead-ball spot and observes continuing action against the ball carrier. The Referee and Back Judge move

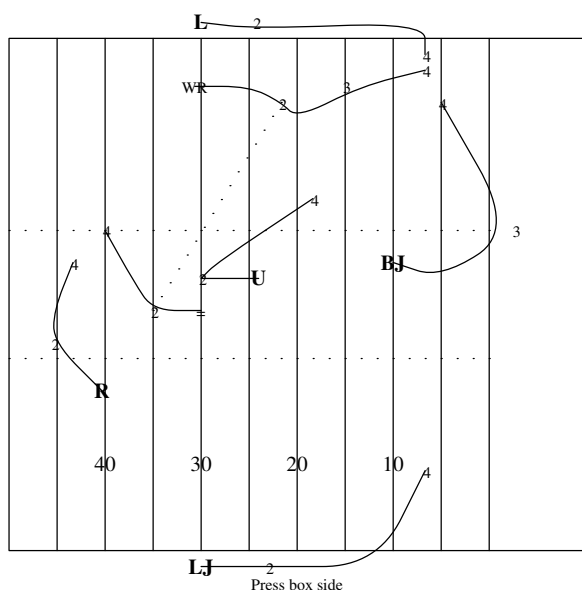
quickly into the vicinity to assist in coverage, with the Back Judge going into the team area if necessary. The Umpire moves downfield to a spot level with the dead-ball spot. Throughout the play the Linesman is responsible for action in the centre of the field behind the Referee and Umpire.

Figure H: Example play (4-man crew) pitchout option play



The Referee maintains coverage as the quarterback (Q) rolls out to the Line Judge's side of the field (1). The Line Judge steps into the backfield to observe the trailing back (P). If the ball is pitched to the outside back (2) the Referee watches for continuing action against the quarterback while the Line Judge takes the ball and the ball carrier. If the ball is not pitched then the Line Judge watches the trailing back until the quarterback crosses the neutral zone (3) and then takes responsibility for him. The Linesman takes a position to assist on ruling whether the pitch goes backwards or forwards. The Umpire at all times watches the action at the point of attack and in front of the ball carrier.

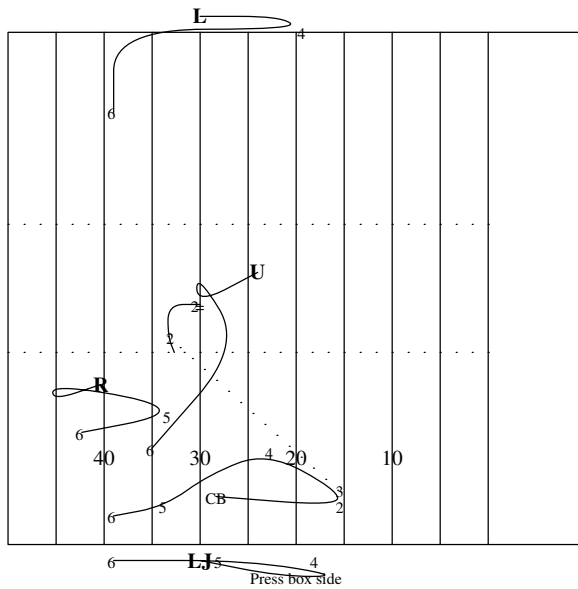
Figure I: Example play (5-man crew) pass downfield to Linesman's side of field



As the quarterback drops back into the pass pocket (1) the Referee drops back correspondingly to keep out of the way, maintaining coverage of players in the backfield. The Umpire steps up into the neutral zone in order to be able to rule on whether the pass crosses it. The wing officials move downfield slightly to be in position to cover the receivers. The Back Judge moves back to keep the potential receivers between himself and the wing officials. When the quarterback throws the ball (2) the Referee must continue to watch him in case of roughing the passer fouls. The Umpire turns and watches the pass in flight in order to be able to rule on whether it is caught or incomplete. The Linesman and Back Judge also watch the receiver and

those around him for illegal action. After the pass is complete and the ball carrier is progressing downfield he is the Linesman's responsibility (3). Other officials watch the action around the line of scrimmage. When the ball carrier is tackled (4), the Linesman moves to the dead-ball spot and the Back Judge assists with coverage and, after all action has ceased, with relaying a ball to the inbounds spot.

Figure J: Example play (4-man crew) interception return



As the officials read pass (1), the Referee backs up to stay clear of the passer, the Umpire steps up towards the neutral zone and the wing officials move downfield slightly after the receivers and defenders. At the time the pass is thrown (2) the Line Judge and Linesman are watching for contact between all eligible receivers on their side of the field. With the pass in the air the Umpire pivots to watch the point where it comes down and the Line Judge, having determined the most likely receiver, watches for pass interference, etc. When the pass is intercepted by the cornerback (CB) (3), the Line Judge has responsibility for the ball carrier and the Umpire watches blocking on the return (4 and 5). When the ball carrier is tackled (6), the Line Judge

has the dead-ball spot and, after ensuring that there are no continuing action fouls, the Referee assists in retrieving/relaying a ball to the inbounds spot. Throughout the return the Linesman observes action away from the ball.

26.3 – Basic goal line responsibilities

Figure A: 4-man crew

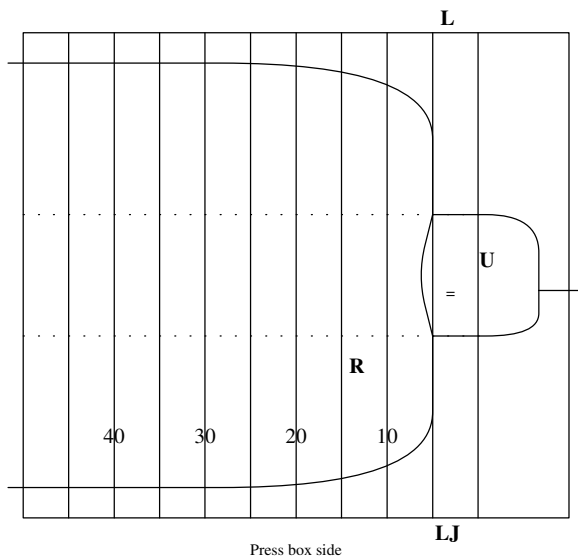


Figure B: 5-man crew

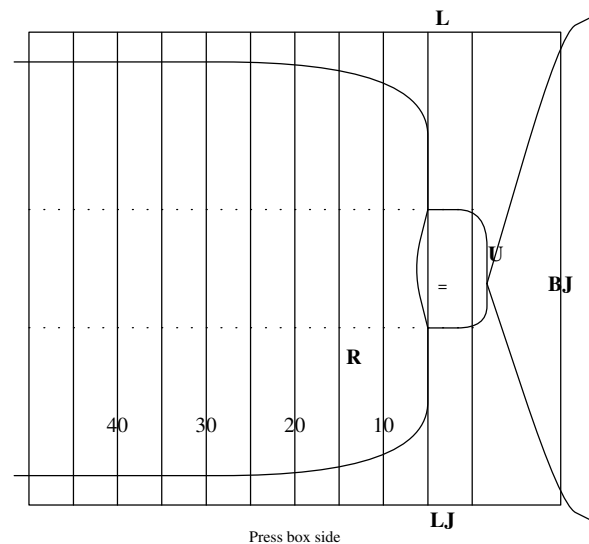


Figure C: 6-man crew

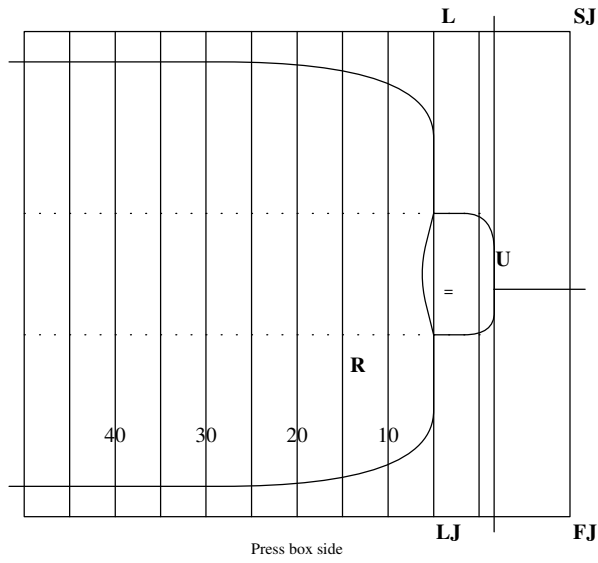


Figure D: 7-man crew (ball between 7 & 20-yard lines)

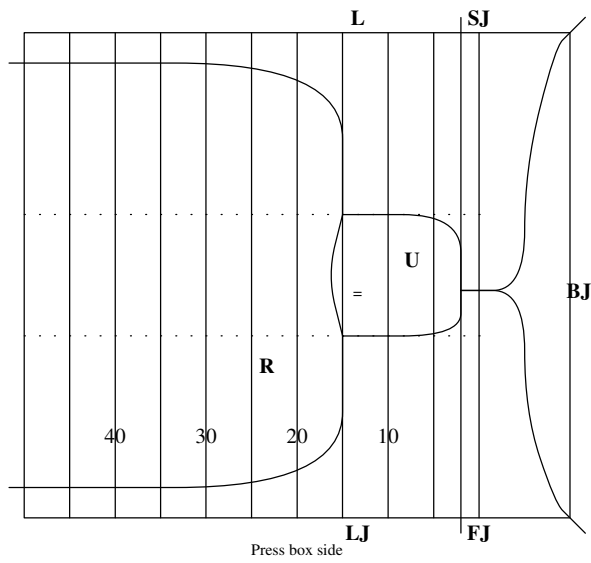
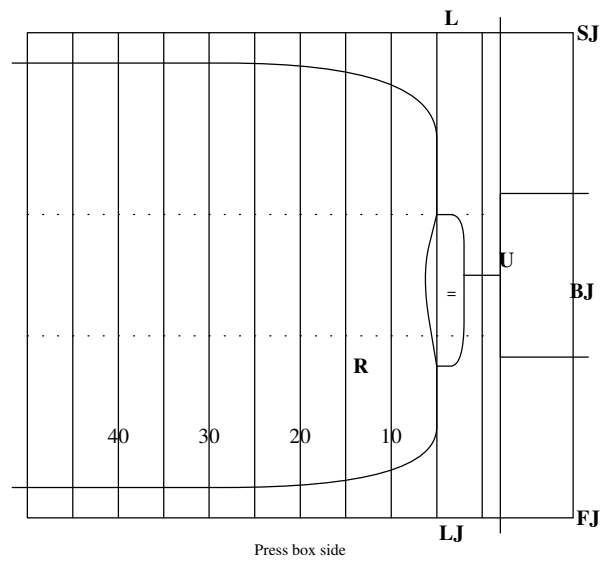


Figure E: 7-man crew (ball inside 7-yard line)



26.4 – Basic punt responsibilities

Figure A: 4-man crew

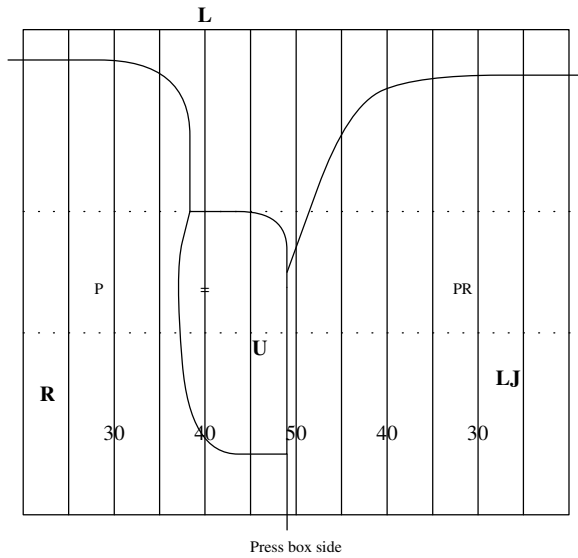


Figure B: 5-man crew

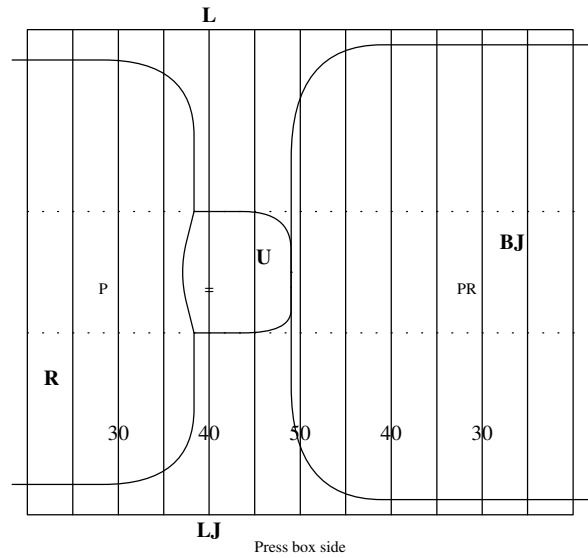


Figure C: 6-man crew

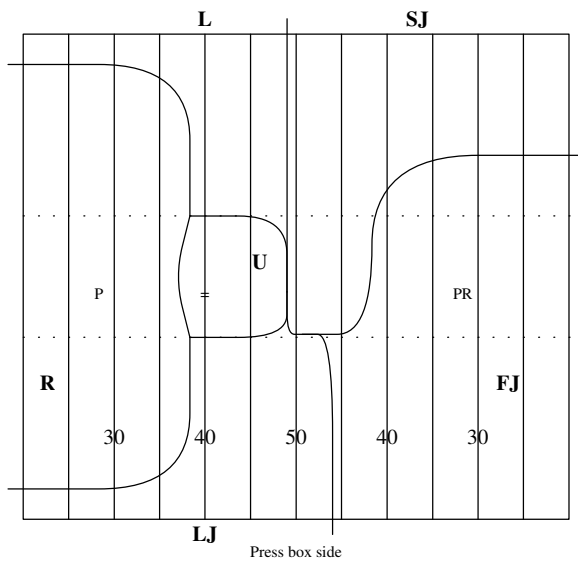


Figure D: 7-man crew

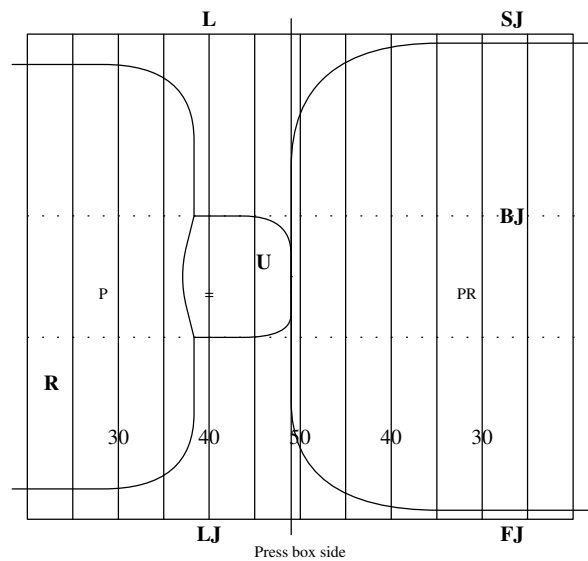
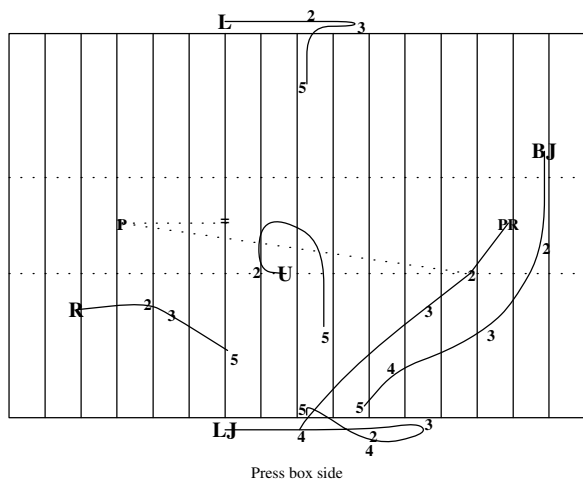


Figure E: Example play (5-man crew) punt return



The Referee concentrates on action in the backfield especially against the kicker after the ball is kicked (1). When the ball is kicked the Line Judge moves downfield 10-15 yards. The Back Judge takes a position in front of the deep receiver so that he can observe the catch (2), and has responsibility for the ball carrier until the ball carrier crosses the yard line occupied by the Line Judge (3). The Line Judge follows the ball carrier until he goes out of bounds (4) with the Referee and Umpire observing action ahead of the ball carrier and the Back Judge watching for continuing action fouls behind and around

the ball carrier. The Linesman observes players away from the ball. The Line Judge is the Coverer and will mark the dead-ball spot while the Referee and Back Judge assist in returning the ball to the inbounds spot (5) once all action has ceased.

26.5 – Basic field goal or try attempt responsibilities

(Arrows show direction officials should move if Team A switch to a run/pass formation)

Figure A: 4-man crew

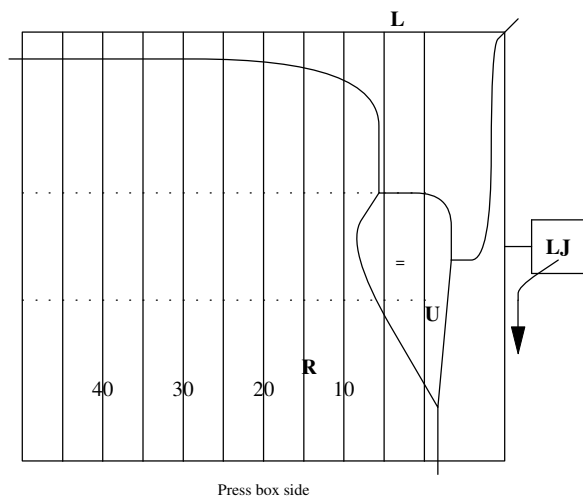


Figure B: 5-man crew

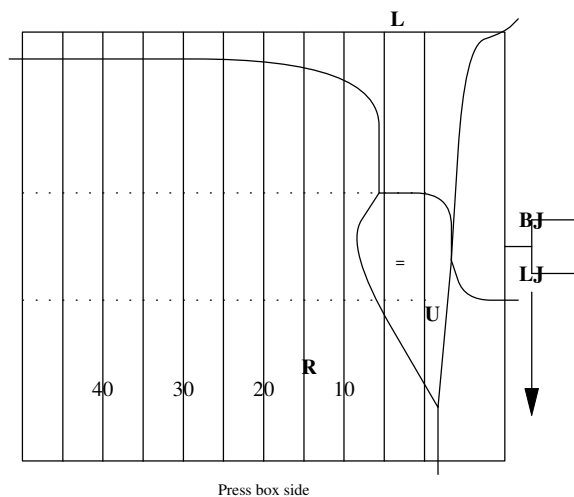


Figure C: 6-man crew

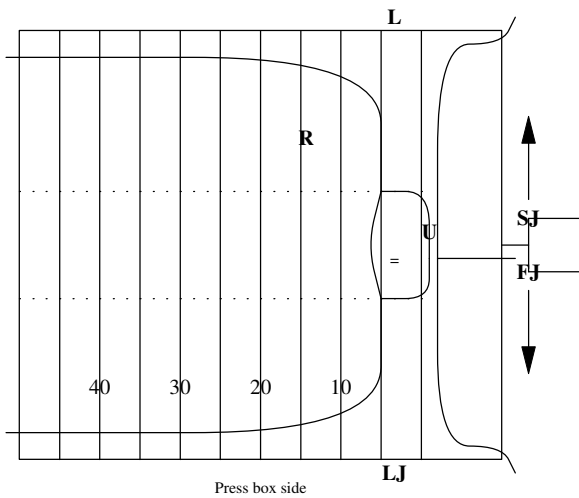


Figure D: 7-man crew (ball outside 5-yard line)

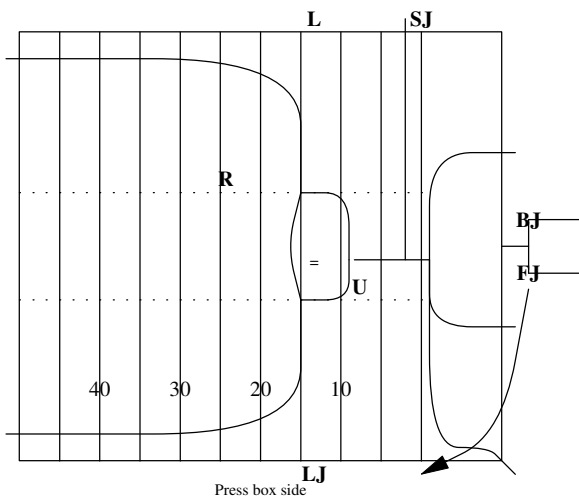


Figure E: 7-man crew (ball inside 5-yard line)

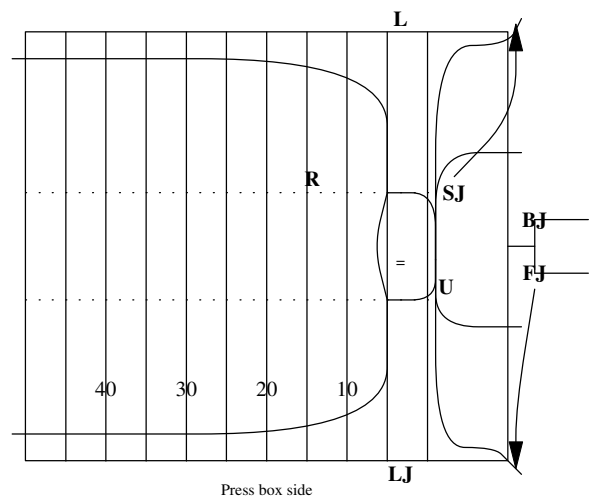
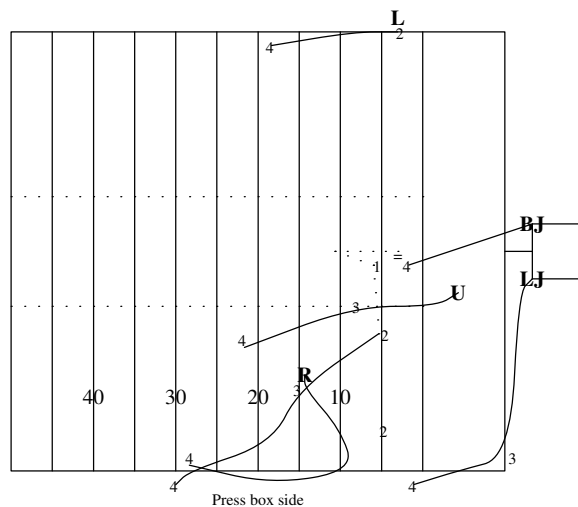


Figure F: Example play (5-man crew) blocked field goal attempt



The field goal attempt is blocked behind the line of scrimmage (1). The Referee immediately responds by moving towards the press box sideline, maintaining a position clear of action

Change codes:‡ CFO; † better coverage; § fill gap; ◊ clarification; ® better communication; × deleted; ® rule change ˆ editorial

around the ball. The Umpire stays on the goal line ready to rule if the ball is advanced, and the Linesman also moves to the goal line for the same reason. The Line Judge moves towards the corner pylon while the Back Judge moves up to the end line. The ball is recovered by the defense (2) and advanced away from the end zone. The Referee has sideline responsibility and covers the ball carrier, while the Umpire moves to observe action around the ball carrier. As the other officials move to cover continuing action away from the ball (3) the Referee follows the ball carrier up the sideline until the ball carrier is forced out of bounds (4). The Umpire and Line Judge must get into position to observe action around the ball carrier, even if from a distance. The Linesman and Back Judge observe the players around the original line of scrimmage.