

Compare and contrast football schemes

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It has often been stated in the Nation Football League that offense sells tickets while defense wins championships. That being said most teams implore either some version of the 3-4 schemes or the 4-3 schemes. While both defenses consist of a seven man front (7 players within 5 yards of the line of scrimmage) and used primarily to shut down opposing offenses running games we will examine the two to see which one is overall more effective in our quest to reach the promise land.

Aside from both schemes using 7 man fronts both also consist of a 4 man secondary (2 cornerbacks and 2 safeties). Within both schemes these secondaries are responsible for providing zone coverage by dividing the field into quarters with each player responsible for manning his zone. Both schemes are also known as gap control defenses by assigning its front seven players to fill a gap along the opposing offenses line of scrimmage. It is within these gap assignments that we can begin to explore the differences in the schemes.

The 4-3 assigns each one of its front seven players to fill one specific gap with very little changing of assignments. It is the 4-3 motto, "win your gap, win the game". Also, in the 4-3 when blitzing occurs, (blitz being when a linebacker or defensive back attacks a gap at the snap of the ball before the play has been dissected) the blitzing player normally attacks the gap that he has already been originally assigned to. By providing four defensive linemen the 4-3 scheme also eliminates the offensive units the ability to get direct blocks on its linebackers. This tactic often allows for the linebackers to attack their assigned gaps with little or no resistance from the opposing offense. So as one can tell the 4-3 is very simple in its overall scheme, but for some,

simple is most effective. Simple meaning it allows the players to react more instead of thinking about their assignments.

When assigning their front seven to gaps the 3-4 defense does not assign them to specific gaps, but at times multiple gaps to allow other members freedom to roam without any responsibilities. This strategy makes it very difficult for offenses to recognize which defender is assigned to which gap. This also proves to play a major role when blitzing out of this scheme. By assigning multiple gap responsibilities, blitzing players can now select which gaps they choose to attack as oppose to the pre-determine gaps selected in the 4-3 scheme. While this strategy can be very effective, it is also very complex and can become quite confusing to the defenders at times causing gaps to be left unfilled by two or more defenders selecting the same gap to attack.

In comparing the 3-4 scheme versus the 4-3 scheme, we must finally take a look at the statistics which is the most important tale of the tape to any defense. In a 2007 study composed by Cold Hard Football Facts (Sandritter, 2007), the 3-4 scheme held a slight advantage over its opponent the 4-3. In points per game allowed, the 3-4 yielded 21 versus the 4-3's 21. 5, in passing yards per game the 3-4 allowed 323. 3 versus the 4-3's 326. 4, and in rushing yards per game, the 3-4 gave up 108. 8 versus 108. 9 given up by the 4-3. However, the study also concluded that in the last ten years, the Super Bowl winners have utilized the 4-3 scheme seven of those ten times. Time to make the call coach!