

# Transforming Your Defense into a “Smart-Weapon, Guided-Missile” Attacking Defense

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Through the 1990’s many defenses were transformed from “read and react” defenses into attacking defenses. An effective attacking defense is not just a loose cannon, it’s a guided missile. To be effective you have to know when and where to attack. Sophisticated scouting software of the opponent’s offense (i.e., through statistical analysis) gives the defensive coaching staff the tools it needs to create a “smart-weapon, guided-missile” attacking defense.

## Creating the Defensive Call Sheet so that you attack based on situation

“If you’ve done your homework, then during the game you should be making your defensive calls from your clipboard’s Defensive Call Sheet.” That means you have to know (based on scouting) what they’re likely to do by down & distance, hash mark, or different field zones (e.g., in your red zone).

Figure 1 shows three down and distance situations extracted from an entire report on an NCAA Division III team out of the Midwest. The entire report was generated by software which analyzed two game’s worth of plays (i.e., a total of about 175 plays).

1st & Long (7 or More Yards)	3rd & Long (7 or More Yards)	3rd & Short (3 or Less Yards)
Total Plays: 56	Total Plays: 20	Total Plays: 8
Run: 39 Times, at 70%	Pass: 19 Times, at 95%	Run: 7 Times, at 88%
Pass: 17 Times, at 30%	Run: 1 Time, at 5%	Pass: 1 Time, at 12%
Sweep: 9 Times, at 16%	Fly: 4 Times, at 20%	GivOpt: 4 Times, at 50%
Iso: 8 Times, at 14%	Post: 4 Times, at 20%	QBSnk: 1 Time, at 12%
GivOpt: 6 Times, at 11%	Out: 4 Times, at 20%	Sweep: 1 Time, at 12%
QckOut: 4 Times, at 7%	Delay: 3 Times, at 15%	Iso: 1 Time, at 12%
Strtch: 3 Times, at 5%	Flare: 2 Times, at 10%	Fly: 1 Time, at 12%
Out: 3 Times, at 5%	QBSwp: 1 Time, at 5%	
Drag: 3 Times, at 5%	Cross: 1 Time, at 5%	
. . .	Hook-Go: 1 Time, at 5%	

Figure 1.

### Quick Analysis:

- 1<sup>st</sup> & Long – The defense needs to be able to stop the run, particularly, Sweeps, Isos, and Options. When there’s a pass, it appears that they run primarily short routes: Quick Out, Out and Drag.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> & Long – In 2 games, this team only ran the ball 1 time on 3<sup>rd</sup> & Long. So, what kind of defense are you going to be in? Are you going to have 7 or 8 in the box? Probably not!
- 3<sup>rd</sup> & Short – In 2 games this team only threw the ball 1 time on 3<sup>rd</sup> and Short. Would you want to have your Nickel or Dime package in? Probably not!

*Taking Advantage:*

- Take advantage of these situational tendencies by creating a comprehensive Defensive Call Sheet based on situations (down, distance, hash, etc.).
- Get them into poor down & distance situations by taking advantage of their tendencies. For example, by getting them into a 2<sup>nd</sup> & Long situation.
- When you get them into poor down & distance situations, then you can be even “play more downhill” at them.
- You’ll want to take advantage in at least three ways: 1) by calling particular fronts and coverages based on the situation; 2) by changing the personnel used (e.g., substituting in quickness, etc.); and 3) by calling stunts and blitzes at the right time.
- Finally, you have to know when to put away the Defensive Call Sheet. If you get a 2 or 3 touchdown lead, then you will force their offensive coordinator out of his game plan. His situational tendencies will not be the same (particularly down and distance) and the calls you have on your Defensive Call Sheet will be wrong.

**Transforming your Attacking Defense into a Smart-Weapon**

When your defensive personnel have been trained to recognize of-field situations, then they can make adjustments to the situational calls sent in from the sidelines. Your sent-in calls (based on situations) turned the attacking defense into a “guided-missile”; the on-field adjustments (made by your players) can turn it into a “smart-weapon, guided-missile” attacking defense.

Figure 2 shows a formation report extracted from an entire report on an NCAA Division III team out of the Midwest. This was the analyzed team’s number 1 running formation; they rarely passed out of it. (Note: This is the same team analyzed in Figure 1.)

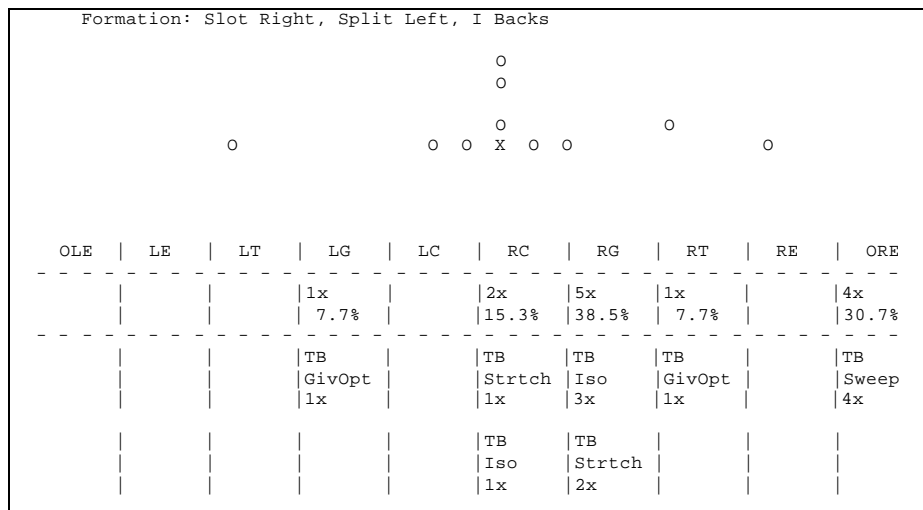


Figure 2

*Quick Analysis:*

- Imagine you’re a Mike LB standing in front of the Center.

- All the plays (except one) run to your right, i.e., toward the slot side.
- The TB is the only ball carrier used.
- They run Sweeps to the outside, and Isos and Stretches up the middle.
- Now, what defense would you want called against this formation? Probably not a pass defense, right?

*Hypothetical Situation – “the right call by situation, but the wrong call by formation”*

- It’s 3<sup>rd</sup> & Long (See Figure 1), and because you did your homework, you’ve got a pass defense called with a blitz.
- Now, their offense lines up in the Slot formation shown in Figure 2.
- What do your defensive players do? There are a number of alternatives, such as:
  1. Do not change anything, and execute the defense and blitz you have called.
  2. Call the blitz off, but remain in a pass defense.
  3. Call the blitz off, and adjust the defense based on the knowledge that this is their number 1 formation for running the ball.

*Taking Advantage – transforming your attacking defense into a “smart-weapon”*

- Teach your players to recognize on-field situations.
- Teach them when and how to get *you* out of a bad call (it’s the right call by situation, but the wrong call by formation).
- You have to know exactly what formations they are going to run, and what plays and personnel they are going to use.
- You absolutely must have this information by Sunday night so that you can effectively prepare your players during the week’s practice.
- Scouting software makes this job doable.

## **Increasing Effectiveness During Practice**

*Here are two ways to utilize practice time more effectively*

1. By spending time making sure your defense knows how to correctly align to their formations.
2. By developing specific drills that get your players ready for the type of plays they’re likely to see.

*Proper alignment*

- Scouting software cannot tell you how to align your defense, but it can make your job easier when trying to figure out what formations they are running.
- You would have few worries if everybody on your schedule ran out of the same formations. But they don’t! With today’s wide-open offenses, you need scouting software to help you analyze their formations.
- Starting with Monday’s practice, it’s absolutely imperative that *you* know what formations they are going to use, so that you can teach your players how to correctly align your defense to their formations.

### *Developing specific drills*

- Computer scouting cannot tell you what drills to develop and run, but it can make your job easier when figuring out how they’re getting the ball to the hole.
- Does their offense try to out flank you? Or trap you? Computer scouting software can easily analyze 100’s of plays to help you figure this out.
- Each week you can develop specific drills that teach your players how to disrupt their blocking schemes, i.e., stop them from getting the ball to the hole. For example, if they like to out-flank with sweeps, then work drills that reinforce the Ends not getting hooked.

### **Scouting Software Considerations**

- It must include reports based on situation: Down & Distance, Hash Mark, and Field Zones (e.g., in your red zone).
- It must include extensive formation-based reports that analyze the formation’s running & passing play, QB action on passes, motion, etc.
- It must permit you to make adjustments to these reports. For example, you should be able to adjust the distance for a Long situation (e.g., for one team 3<sup>rd</sup> & Long might be 7 or more yards while for another, it might be 5 or more).
- The reports must be easy to read and shouldn’t contain clutter. If the reports are hard to read, then the value added by the software is marginal.
- It should be easy to enter play data. Typing is out, point and click with the mouse is in.
- The software should come to you, rather than you being forced to come to it. For example, you think in terms of X’s and O’s, a good software package will understand formations and know how to diagram them and know the personnel involved in that formation (e.g., a Pro has a Flanker, Tight End and Split End).
- If cost is a consideration, then the software should run on general-purpose desktop computers and not require extra, specialized (expensive) hardware.

### **Summary**

The old days of calling the game from the “seat of the pants” are quickly fading into the past. To become more effective, you must know when and where to unleash your attacking defense by making calls based on situation. And to put the “icing on the cake” you need to teach you players how to make adjustments to your calls based on on-field situations. All this is can be more easily accomplished if you utilize a good scouting software package.

### **Author Profile**

Dr. Joe Hollingsworth (*Dr. Holly*) is a computer science professor at Indiana University Southeast and has been working with scouting software since 1992. He regularly gives talks at clinics around the country, including coach of the year clinics. This article was excerpted from Dr. Holly’s soon to be published book on scouting. He can be reached at [scout@hollysoftware.com](mailto:scout@hollysoftware.com), and at [www.hollysoftware.com](http://www.hollysoftware.com).