



Passing Game

Forward Pass Training for Referees

Section 14 Mechanics

Focus: Referee Responsibilities

Training Objectives



1

Understand R responsibilities on pass plays

2

Improve QB coverage and pocket awareness

3

Enhance foul recognition and mechanics

Primary Responsibility

- Referee = Quarterback
- Protect passer
- Observe action behind LOS



Pre-Snap Duties

- Count Team A
- Identify formation
- Locate eligible backs
- Prepare for pass or run

Positioning

- Behind QB (shotgun vs under center adjustment)
- Maintain wide angle view
- Keep play framed

Initial Keys

- Focus on QB at snap
- Observe dropback
- Read pass vs run

Pass Read

- QB dropback = pass play
- Shift to protection and passer



Pocket Awareness

- Observe offensive line
- Identify collapsing pocket
- Maintain safe positioning



Passer Protection

- Watch for:
- Roughing passer
- Late hits
- Low hits
- High contact



Illegal Contact

- Identify:
- Defenders hitting QB after release
- Driving QB into ground



Throwing Action

- Watch arm motion
- Determine:
- Forward pass vs fumble



Forward Pass Rule

- Ball moving forward = pass
- Arm going forward is key indicator



Intentional Grounding

- QB under pressure
- Ball thrown away
- Check:
- Pocket presence
- Eligible receiver area

Screen Plays

- QB releases quickly
- Shift focus to blockers
- Watch for ineligible downfield

Ineligible Receivers

- Watch linemen
- Downfield before pass thrown
- Especially on quick passes

Ball Released

- Shift focus briefly
- Confirm pass direction
- Then return to QB



After the Throw

- Continue to observe QB
- Watch for late contact
- Do not follow ball

Communication

- Verbally warn defenders
- Use presence to prevent fouls



Goal Line / Red Zone

- Tighter space
- Faster QB contact
- Heightened awareness



Common Errors

- Watching the ball too early
- Missing roughing the passer
- Poor positioning



Mechanics

- Clear signals
- Strong presence
- Decisive fouls



Key Takeaways

- QB is your responsibility
- Protect the passer
- Stay disciplined in coverage



Pregame Checklist (Referee)

- Confirm crew communication
- Review QB tendencies
- Discuss roughing thresholds
- Review grounding philosophy
- Confirm signals and coverage
- Align on protection focus

Intentional Grounding – Decision Tree

- Was QB under pressure?
- Was QB in pocket?
- Did ball reach LOS?
- Was there eligible receiver in area?
- If NO to all → Grounding
- If YES to any → No foul

Intentional Grounding – Key Indicators

- QB throws ball away to avoid loss
- No receiver in area
- Ball lands short of LOS
- QB still in pocket
- Result: Intentional Grounding

Roughing the Passer – Overview

- Protect the QB at all times
- Focus after release
- Zero tolerance for dangerous contact



Roughing the Passer – Key Fouls

- Late hit after release
- Low hit at knees
- High contact to head/neck
- Driving QB into ground
- Contact with no attempt to avoid



Roughing the Passer – Judgment

- Was defender avoidable?
- Was contact forcible?
- Was QB defenseless?
- Error on safety



Roughing the Passer – Common Misses

- Focusing on ball too early
- Missing secondary contact
- Poor positioning angle



Discussion / Film

- Review QB hits
- Identify fouls
- Discuss positioning



A photograph of a green football field with white yard lines. A brown football is on the left side of the frame. Overlaid on the field are two dark grey rounded rectangular boxes containing white text.

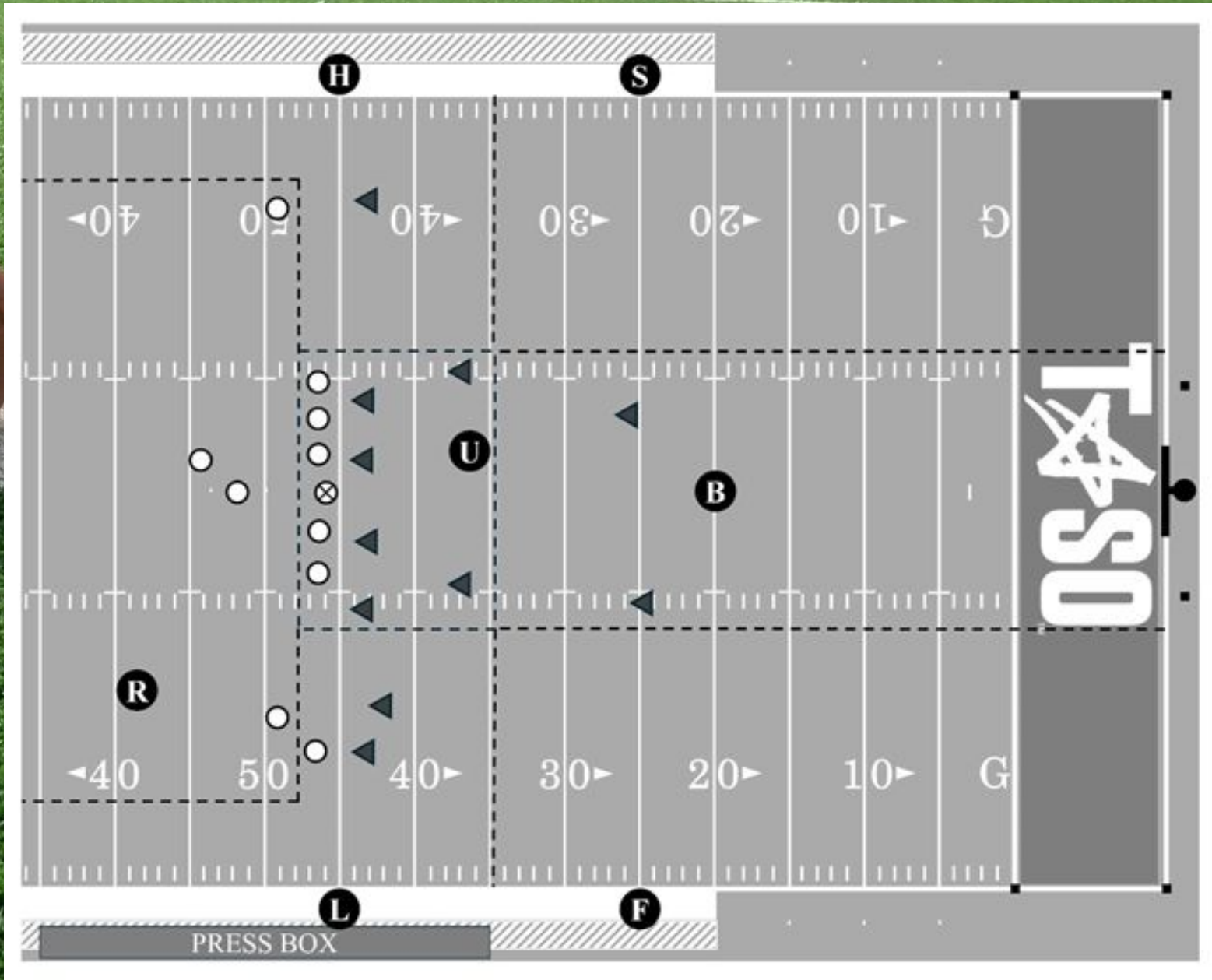
Passing Game

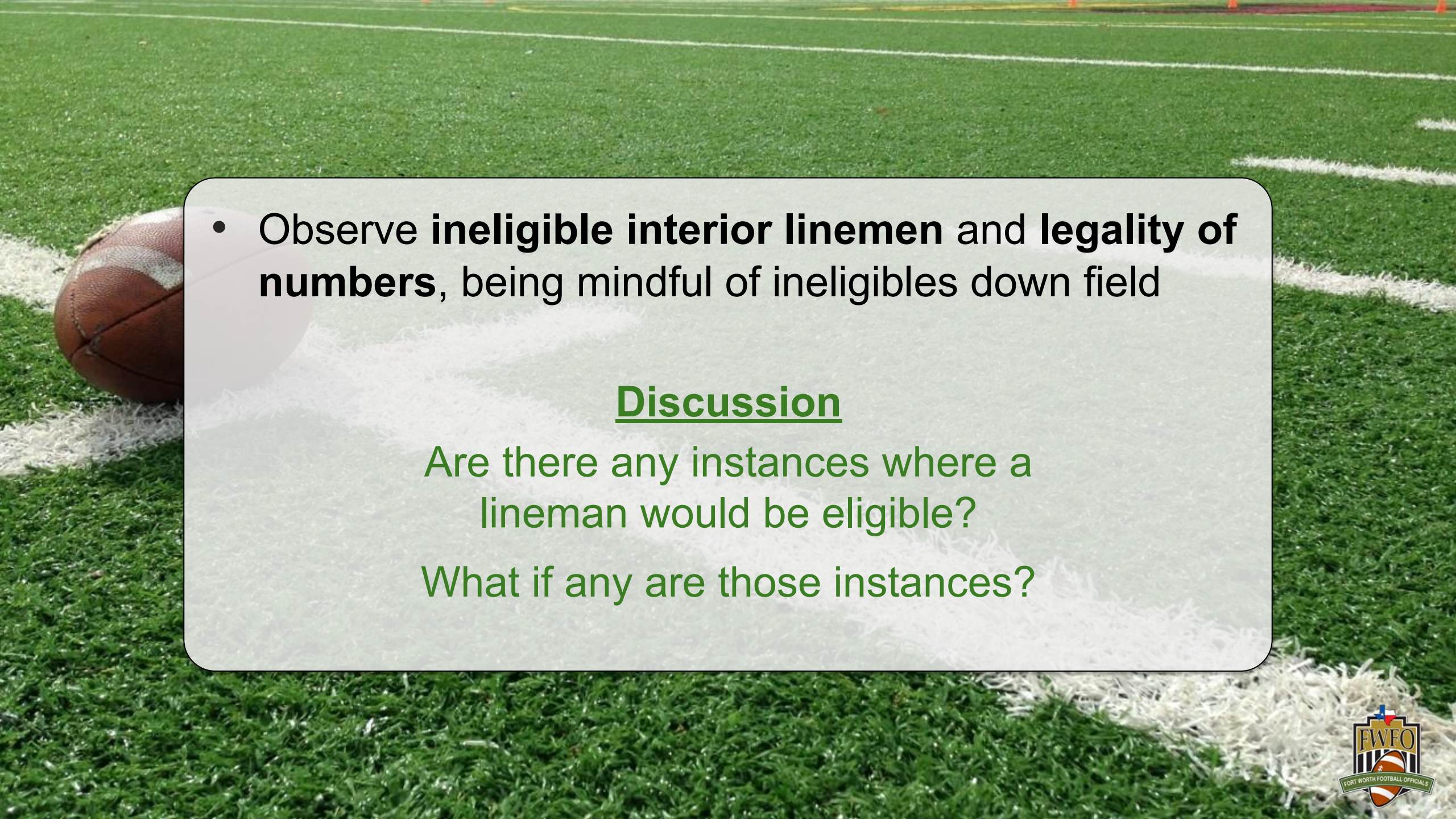
Mechanics Focus for Umpires

Presenter: Chris Thames

Assignment and Basic "Keys"

- **Identify formation and strengths**, lining up in a position to see the snap
- **Take a position 5 to 10 yards from the ball**, clear of Team B players
 - ✓ In a **position to see the ball** at the snap
 - ✓ Watch interior linemen
- "Keys" are the **snapper** and **two guards**, but help with tackles if obvious fouls are observed



- 
- Observe **ineligible interior linemen** and **legality of numbers**, being mindful of ineligible down field

Discussion

Are there any instances where a
lineman would be eligible?

What if any are those instances?

Offensive team Requirements

Violation of each of the following is a Live ball foul; the play is allowed to continue:

1. All Players must be inbounds
2. All Players must either be linemen or backs
(Rule 2-27-4 A.R. 7-1-4-VIII)
3. At least five linemen must wear jerseys numbered 50-79 (Exception: When the snap is from a scrimmage kick formation, par.5 below)
4. No more than 4 players may be backs

Offensive team Requirements

5. In a scrimmage Kick formation at the snap (Rule 2-16-10) Team A may have fewer than five linemen numbered 50-79, subject to the following conditions: (A) Any and all linemen not numbered 50-79 who are ineligible receiver(s) by position become exceptions to the numbering rule when the snapper is established.

Offensive team Requirements

(B) Any and all such numbering exception players must be on the line and may not be at the end of the line. Otherwise, Team A commits a foul for an illegal formation.

(C) Any and all such players are exceptions to the numbering rule throughout the down and remain ineligible receivers unless they -become eligible under Rule 7-3-5 (forward pass touched by official or Team B player)

Offensive team Requirements

The conditions of 5(a)-5(c) are no longer in effect if prior to the snap a period ends or there is a timeout charged to the referee or one of the teams.



Approved Ruling

Team A, with 4th and 8, sends two substitutes numbered 21 and 33 into the game as exceptions to the mandatory numbering and they are positioned legally on their line of scrimmage between the end players on the line of scrimmage. After the ball is snapped, a Team A Player, 15 yds deep in scrimmage kick formation, throws a legal forward pass to an eligible receiver for a 10 yard gain.



Approved Ruling

Ruling: Legal Play (Note: the same play from a field goal formation is legal).

V. A33, an exception to the mandatory numbering rule, assumes a position on the line of scrimmage next to end A88. Before the snap, A88 moved to a backfield position and the flanker opposite side of the line moves to an end position on the line.

Ruling

Ruling: Illegal Formation. Since A33 is now an end, he is thus in an illegal position at the snap (live ball foul)

Penalty - 5 yards, previous spot.



Rule 7.10

Ineligible Receiver Downfield

Article 10

No originally ineligible receiver shall be or have been more than 3 yards beyond the neutral zone until a passer throws a legal forward pass that crosses the neutral zone.

A player is in violation of this rule if any part of their body is beyond the 3-yard limit.



Rule 7.10

EXCEPTION: If the passer is legally throwing the ball away and the ball land near or beyond the sideline (A.R, 7-3-10-I and -III)

Penalty: 5 yards from the previous spot



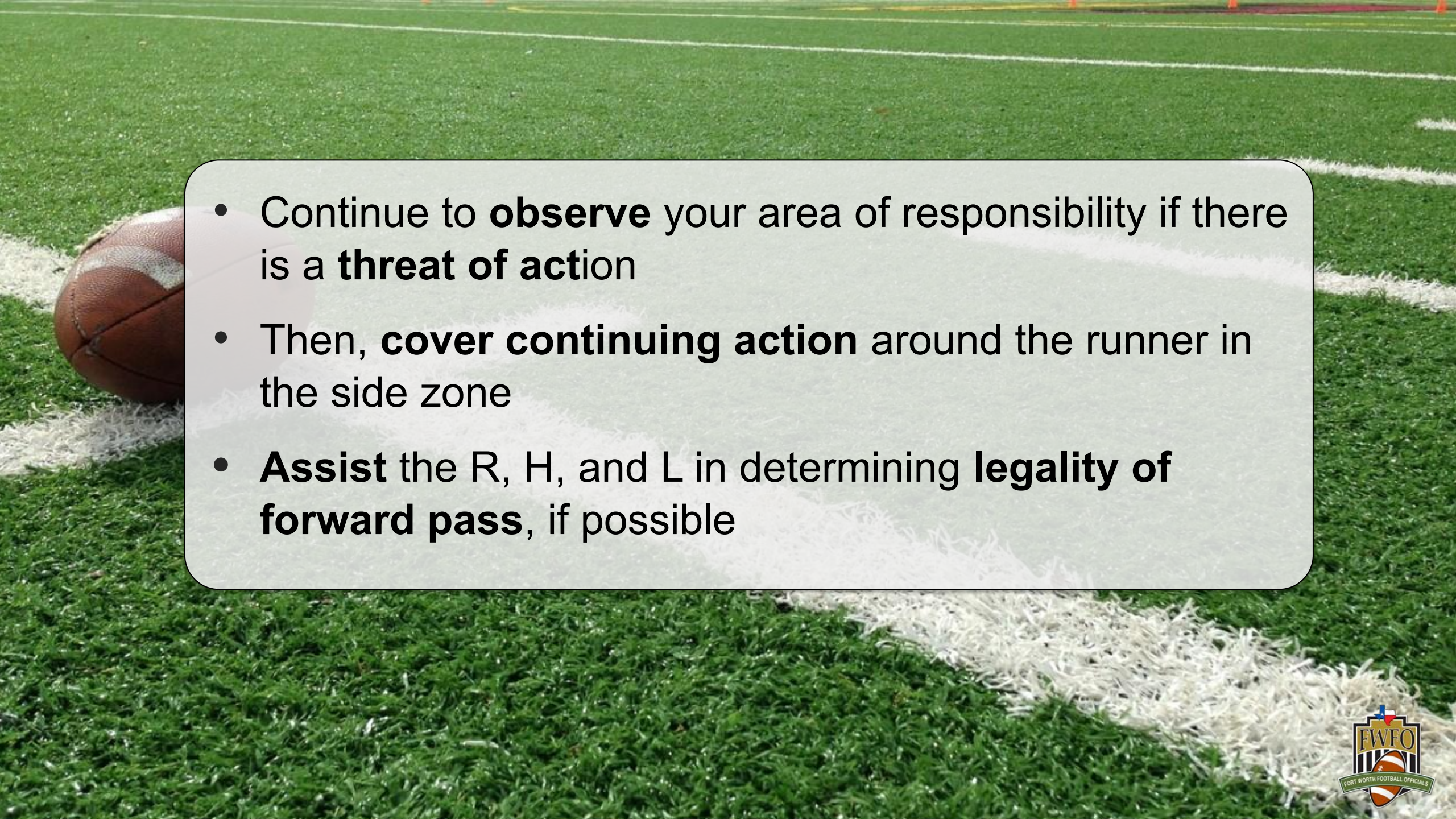
- When you read forward pass, **move toward the line** of scrimmage

Why are we moving toward the line of scrimmage?

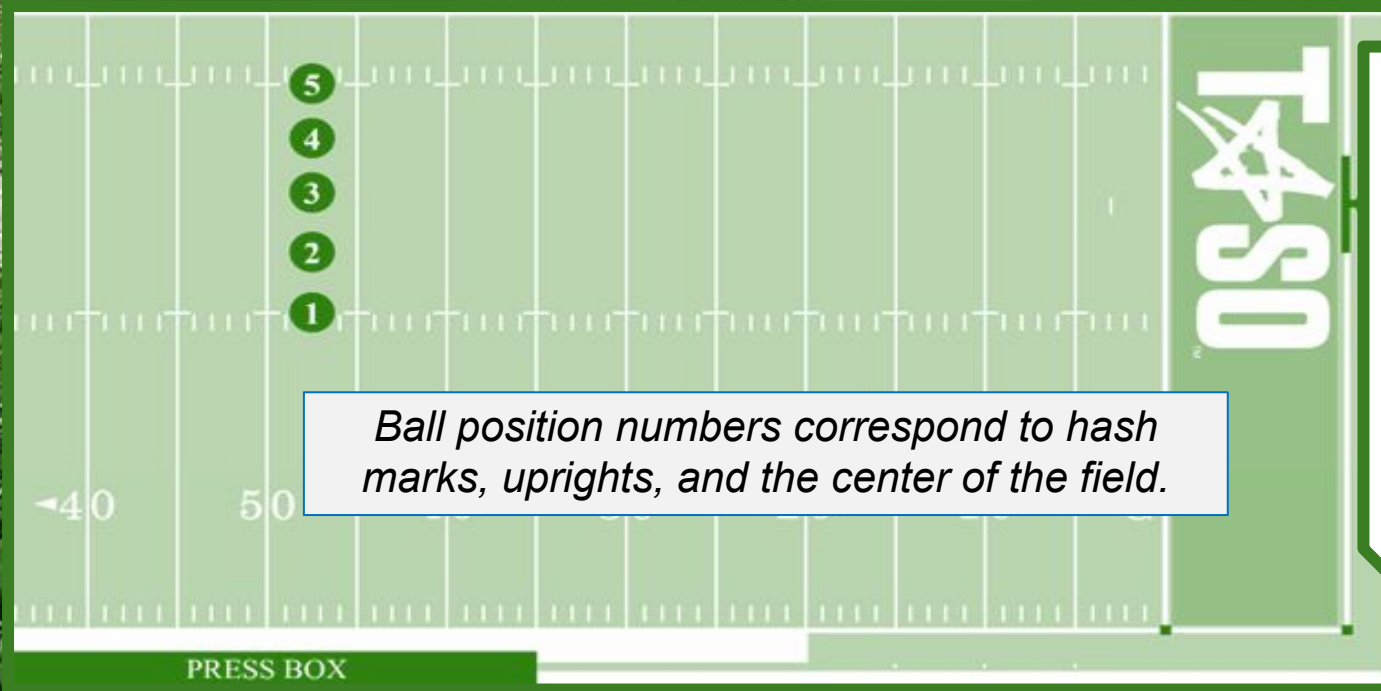
- Be aware of **draws and drag patterns** – know whether a forward pass **crosses the neutral zone**

**You're in the cross hairs most plays.
STAY ALERT !!**

- Pivot on **low trajectory and short passes** and move toward area where pass is headed
- **Assist** with the ruling on **trapped passes**

- 
- A photograph of a green football field with white yard lines. A brown football is on the left side of the frame. A semi-transparent white box with rounded corners is overlaid on the center of the image, containing a bulleted list of instructions.
- Continue to **observe** your area of responsibility if there is a **threat of action**
 - Then, **cover continuing action** around the runner in the side zone
 - **Assist** the R, H, and L in determining **legality of forward pass**, if possible

- **Umpire must know the lateral position** of the ball on the field if the pass is incomplete



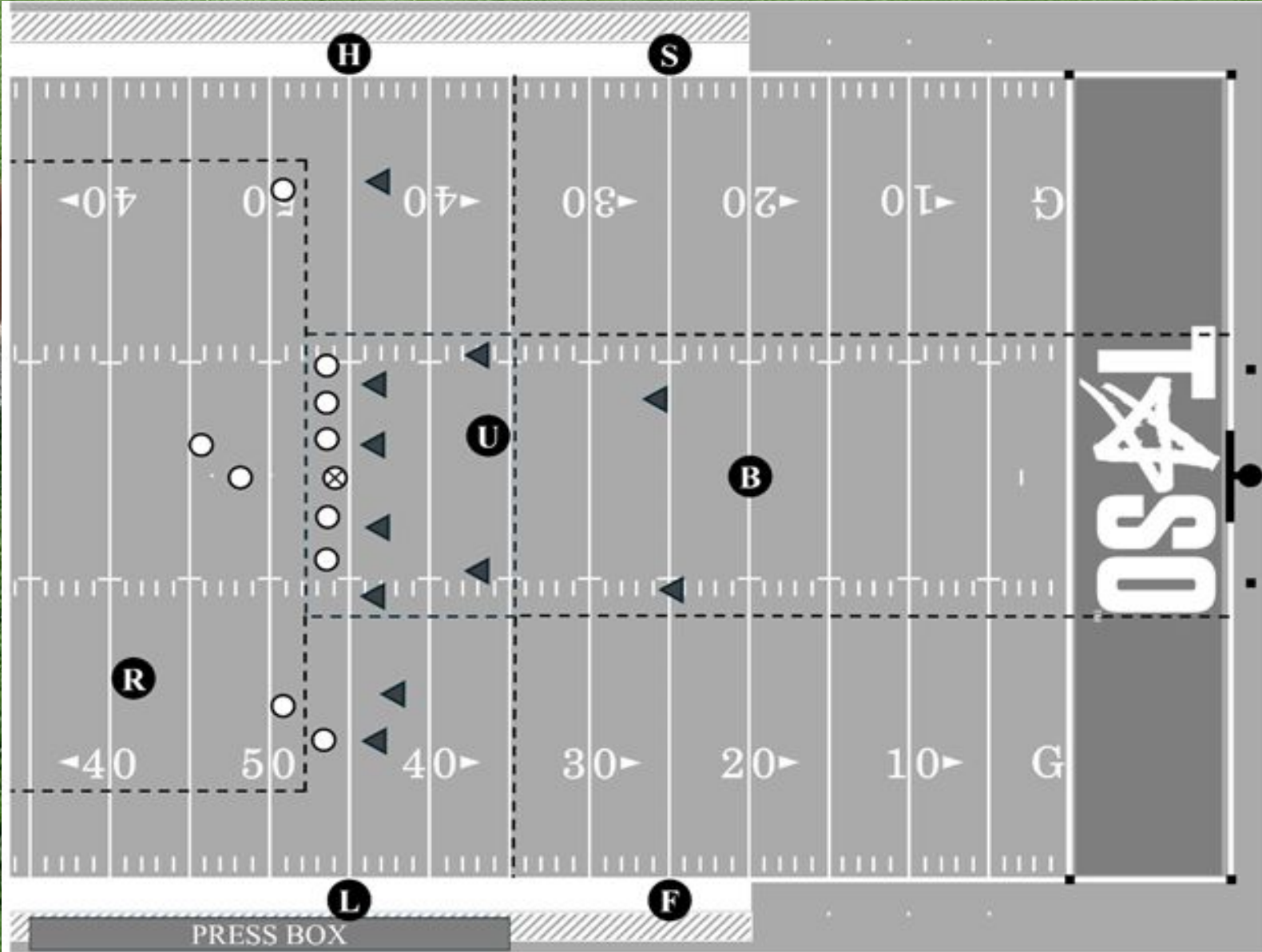
Ball position numbers correspond to hash marks, uprights, and the center of the field.

- 1) Hash closest to the press box.
- 2) Upright closest to the press box.
- 3) Center of the field.
- 4) Upright farthest from the press box.
- 5) Hash farthest from the press box.

A brown football is positioned on the left side of the frame, resting on a green artificial turf field. White yard lines are visible, extending from the foreground into the background. The football has some white tape on its laces.

Passing Game H & L Standard

Crew of 7



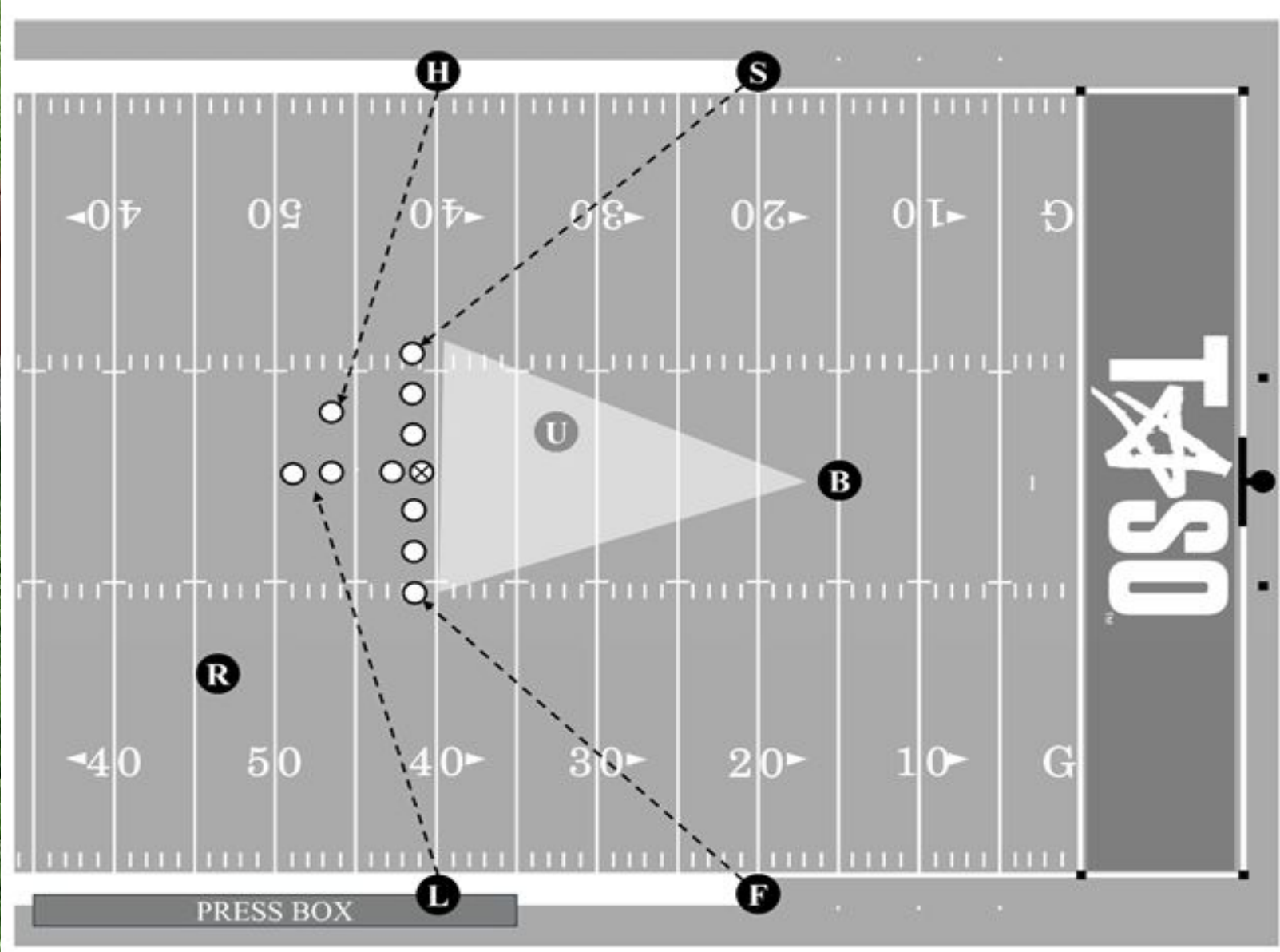
Man, Zone, Ball

- At the **beginning** of each play, the H and L are in **Man** coverage.
- Each **eligible receiver outside the tackles** is assigned to an official responsible for observing the action on (and by) that receiver while attempting to get into a pass route.
- It is essential to **know 'keys'** to the point that they are identified instantly.
- **Problems** arise when **two officials are 'keying' the same** receiver and leave another uncovered.
- Following plays with **unusual formations**, the officials should check with each other to verify that they each 'keyed' the appropriate receiver.

Man, Zone, Ball

- Prior to the snap, officials will **determine the strength** to determine their 'key.'
- They will note their 'key's' **jersey number**, as well as the jersey number of any defender in "**press coverage.**"
- During the initial aspect of the play, the goal is to **observe the action** of the 'key' and any defender in "**press coverage.**"
- Once the receivers have gotten **off the line of scrimmage and into their pass routes**, the officials must **switch to Zone** coverage.
- If the receivers are **not pressed**, the officials will switch to **Zone coverage more quickly.**
- **B, F, and S** are responsible for any receivers who run **deep routes.**

Crew of 7 Standard Formation



Man, Zone, Ball

- H and L are responsible for **shorter routes** as well as **routes in their side zone**.
- H and L must be **aware of routes that take B, F, and S deep** and must be prepared to **adjust their zones accordingly**.
- While in Zone coverage, officials should pay particular attention to **Team B players who hold Team A receivers** as they are running past them or are making cuts during their route.
- Once the **pass is in the air**, switch to **Ball** coverage.

Man, Zone, Ball

- Observe the **action of the defenders** and the receiver in the area where the ball is thrown.
- While the official in that zone will be primarily responsible for **ruling on interference** by either team, an official in another zone may have the only look at a foul and may need to throw their flag.

Pre-Snap Snapshot

- **STRENGTH OF THE FORMATION:** Determined by the number of eligible receivers outside the offensive tackles on each side of the formation. If there is no strong side, a balanced formation, strength is declared to the L side.
- **SNAPSHOT AT THE SNAP:** The position of the receivers is determined by their location, whether set or in motion, when the ball is snapped. This is particularly significant if there is a receiver in motion.
- **BACK IN THE BACKFIELD:** A player is in the backfield between the tackles at the snap. If the receiver is lined up outside the tackles, consider they are a receiver.

Pre-Snap Snapshot

- **TRIPS**: Three or more receivers outside the offensive tackle on the same side of the ball.
- **QUADS**: Four receivers outside the tackle on the same side of the ball.
- **PRESS COVERAGE**: When a defender lines up in a position that is close enough to touch the

Pre-Snap Snapshot

- H/L: Take an **initial position at the sideline**. L will hold the LOS.
- In addition to watching 'keys,' help rule on whether a **pass is caught or touched at/behind or beyond the neutral zone** and whether linemen are **illegally downfield**, particularly if the play is away from you and they are behind the U.
- On drop back passes, H will **drift 5-7 yards downfield** and is initially responsible for their 'key,' then for any passes thrown into the 5-yard belt across the field.
- If the line to gain is less than 7 yards down field, ideally the H will **set up on the line to gain**.

Pre-Snap Snapshot

- Watch the action of the **nearest ineligible lineman** when the action is away from you.
- Cover **pass receptions** in the area between you and the S, F, and B.
- Observe action on players other than the pass receiver if the **pass is thrown out of your area**.
- Determine whether a quick pass thrown toward you is **forward or backward**.
- The covering official, toward whom the ball is thrown, should signal by extending one arm horizontally in the direction of the passing team's goal line **if the pass is ruled backward** [SO2].

Pre-Snap Snapshot

- Be alert and take responsibility for the **legality of forward passes** near the neutral zone.
- Umpire can give valuable assistance with this ruling.

READ YOUR 'KEYS'

- **Hold the line of scrimmage** on flair passes to your side. Be aware of wide outs who stay at or near the line of scrimmage after the snap, a "jailbreak" screen could be coming.
- When your 'key' is **no longer threatened**, go to **zone** coverage.

Crew of 7, continued

- H and L will have the **#3 receiver to their side**, except when there are trips on their side, and they will be assigned #2.
- When there is only one receiver on each side, H and L will observe **backs coming out** of the backfield.
- When there are trips on one side, The #2 receiver is assigned **based on how close they are** to #1 or #3.
- If **closer to #1**, they belong to **H or L**. If closer to #3, the receiver belongs to B.
- In trips formation, the officials must **be prepared to go to zone quickly**, with H and L covering the shallowest routes and F, S, and B covering the remaining vertical routes.
- The R will take the **tackle on the trips side**.

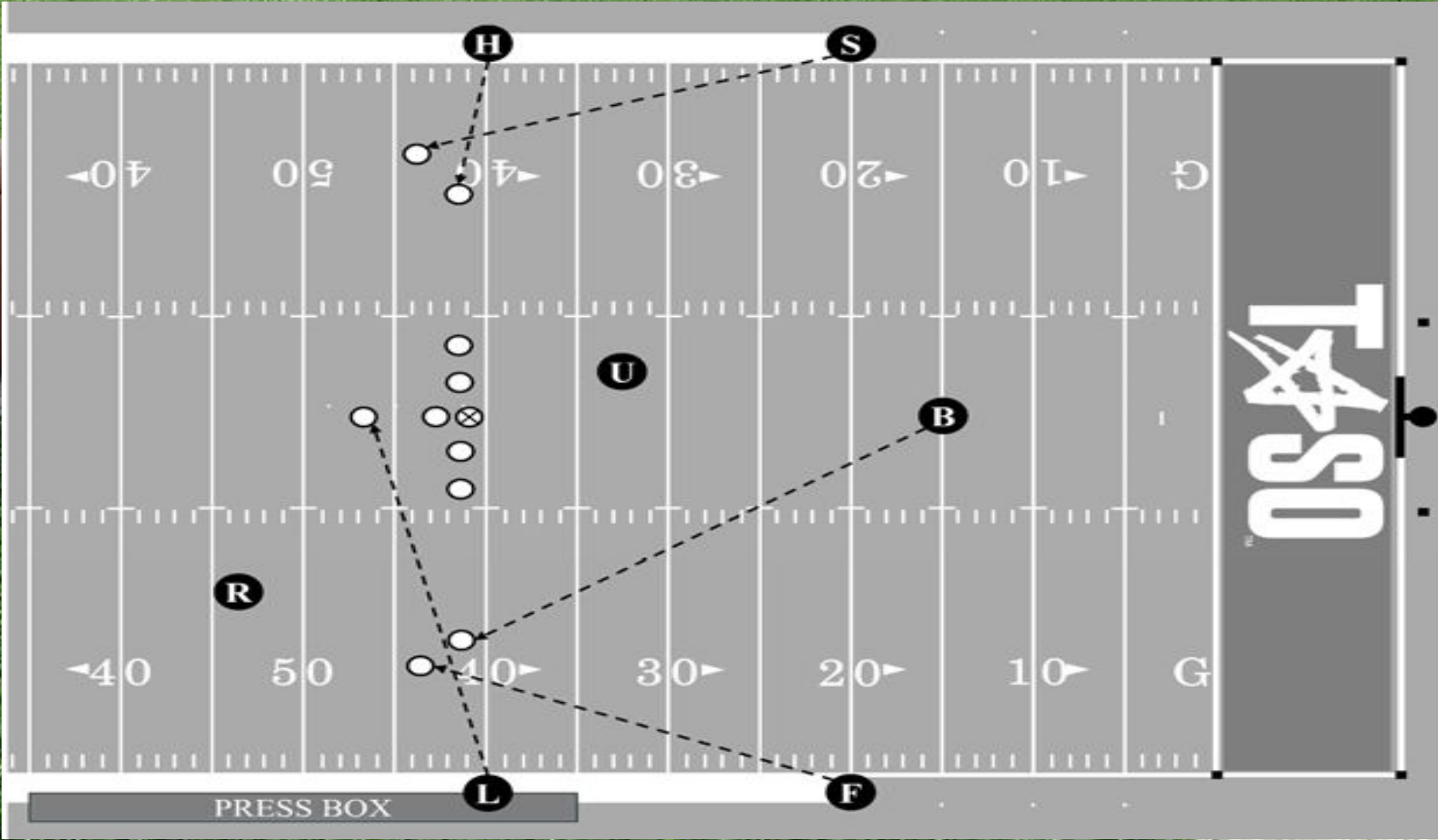
Crew of 7, continued

- If there is a motion back, **strength may change** by the motion back's location at the snap.
- Officials will **take a 'snapshot'** of the formation at the snap and 'key' the appropriate receivers as indicated herein.
- Again, only **count receivers who are outside** the tackles at the snap.
- Sideline officials must be aware of all **wide players** to their side blocking back toward the ball (possible illegal block below waist, clip, etc.).
- The most highly **skilled TASO officials** will know not only which receiver is their 'key,' but which officials are assigned to every receiver.

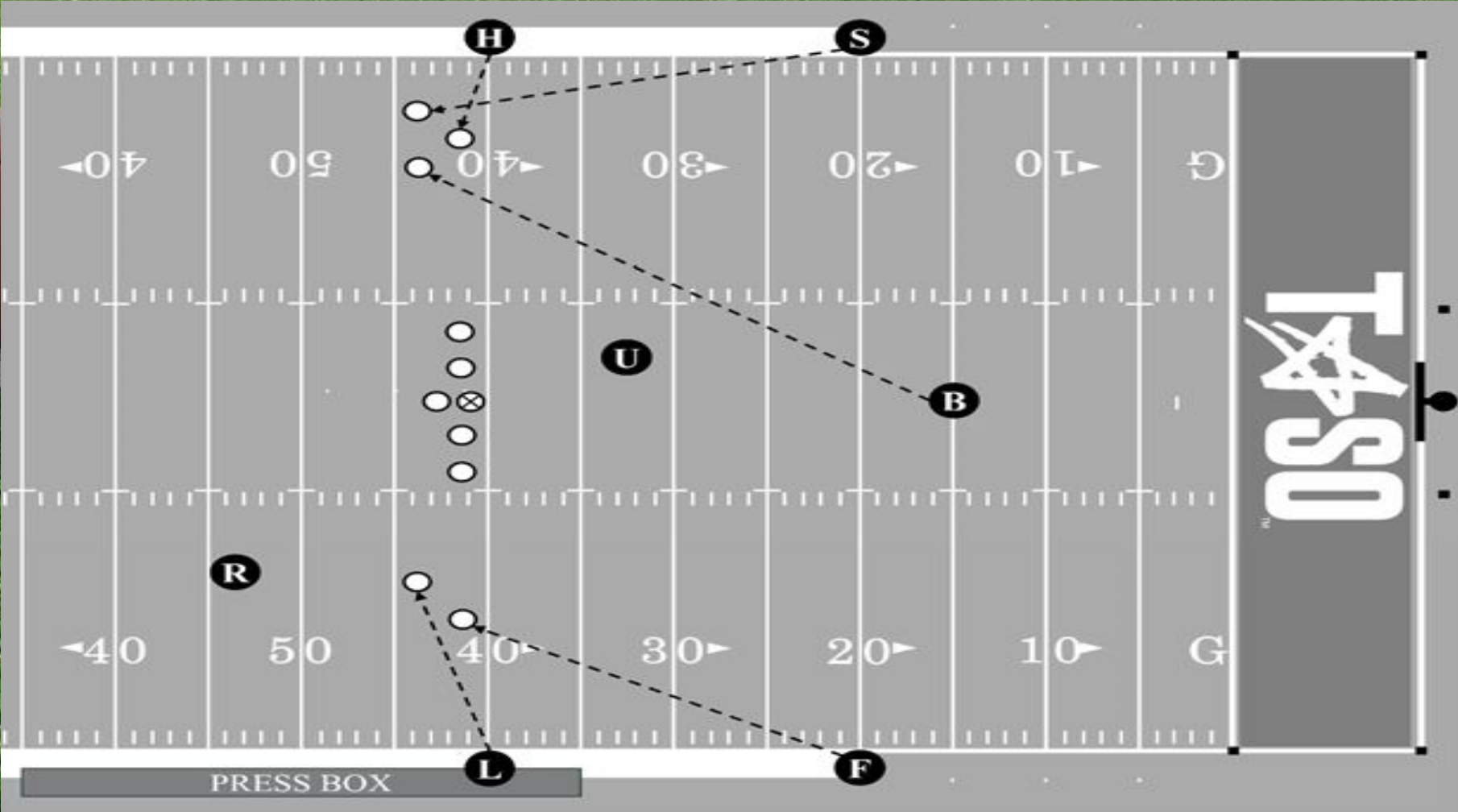
Crew of 7, continued

- The ability to identify 'keys' instantaneously is developed through **practice and experience**.
- HL/L: If there is a **third receiver outside the tackle box** at the snap, normal assignment is the second eligible receiver from the sideline to your side of the formation.
- If you are on the **weak side** of the formation, you will have the second eligible receiver from your sideline.
- Your concern is **not to double cover** F, S or B assignments.

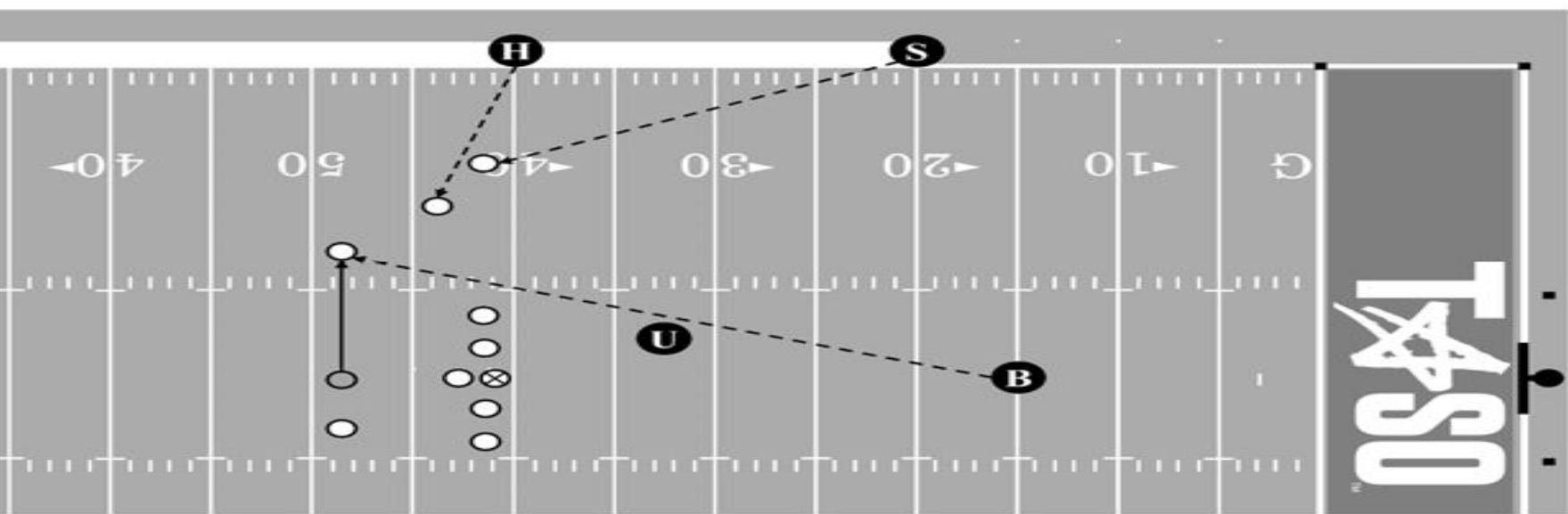
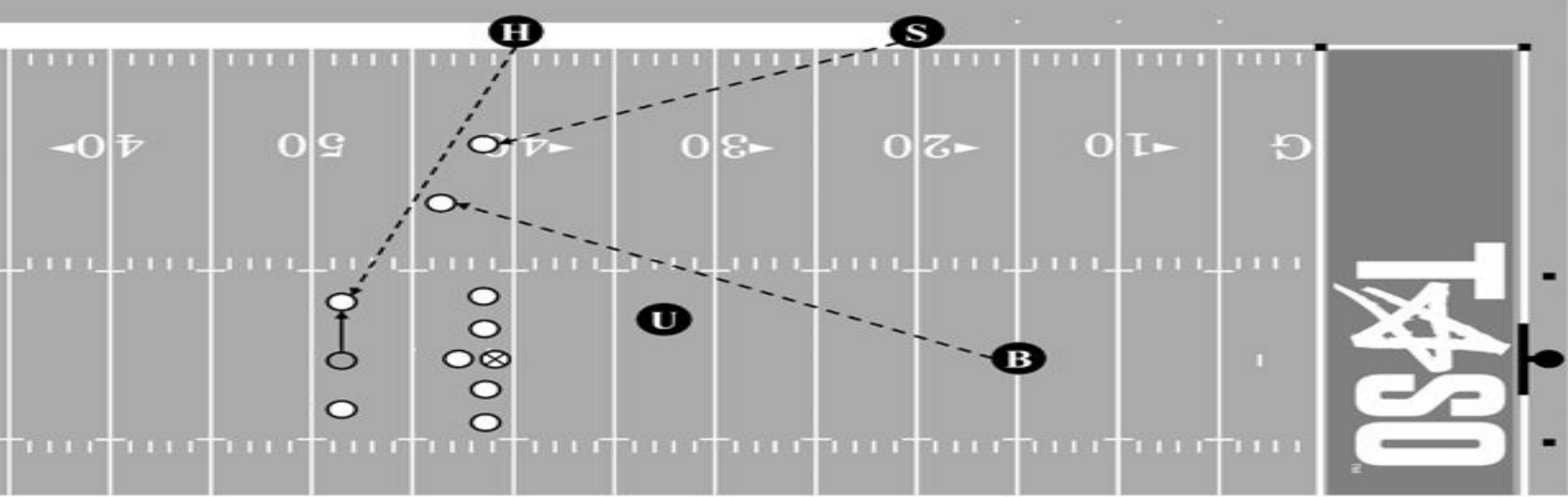
Crew of 7 Twins



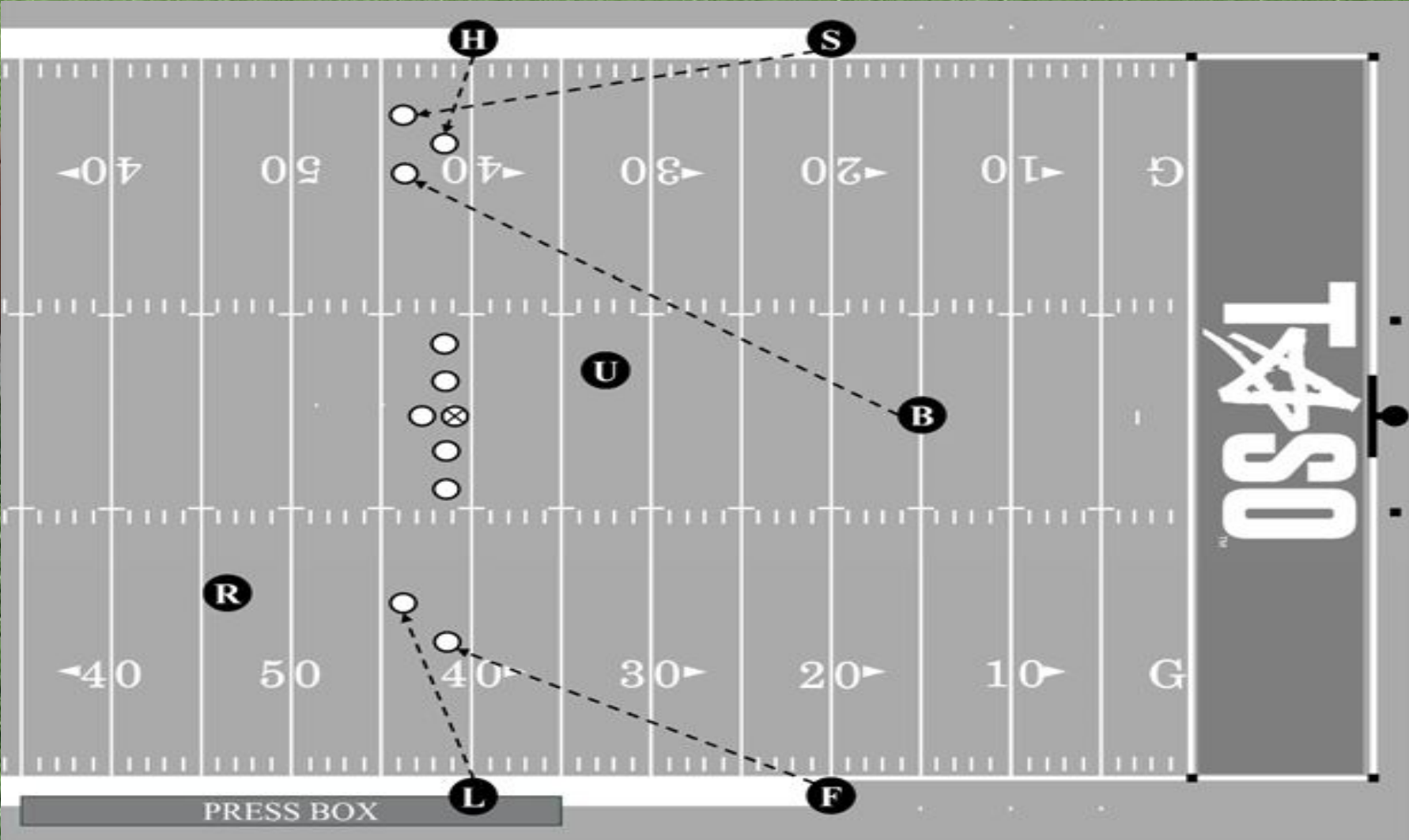
Crew of 7 Trips



Crew of 7 Player in Motion



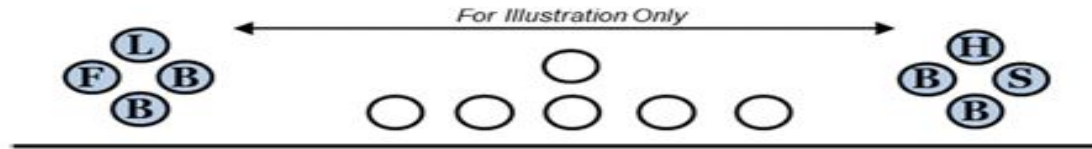
Crew of 7 Trips



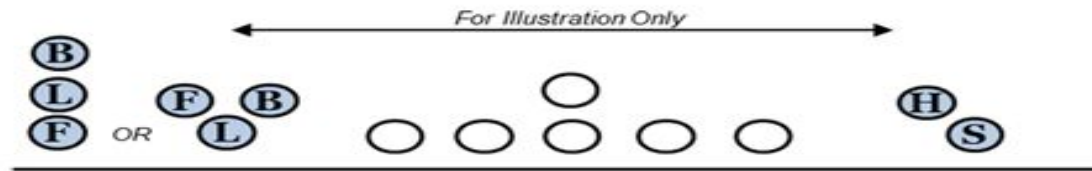
Crew of 7 Recap

RECAP OF TASO KEYS

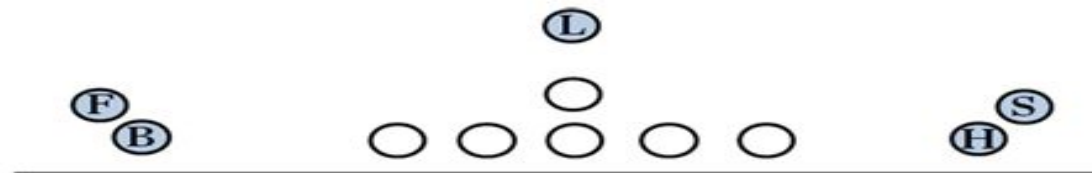
Diamond



Trips

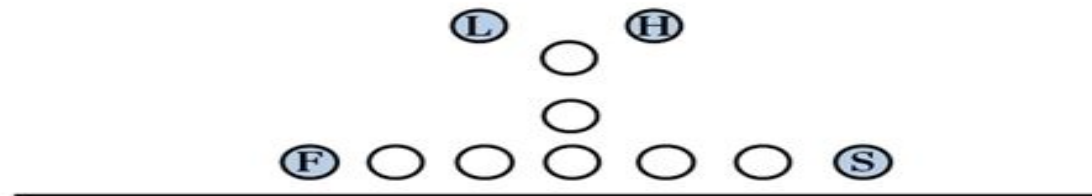


Double Wing

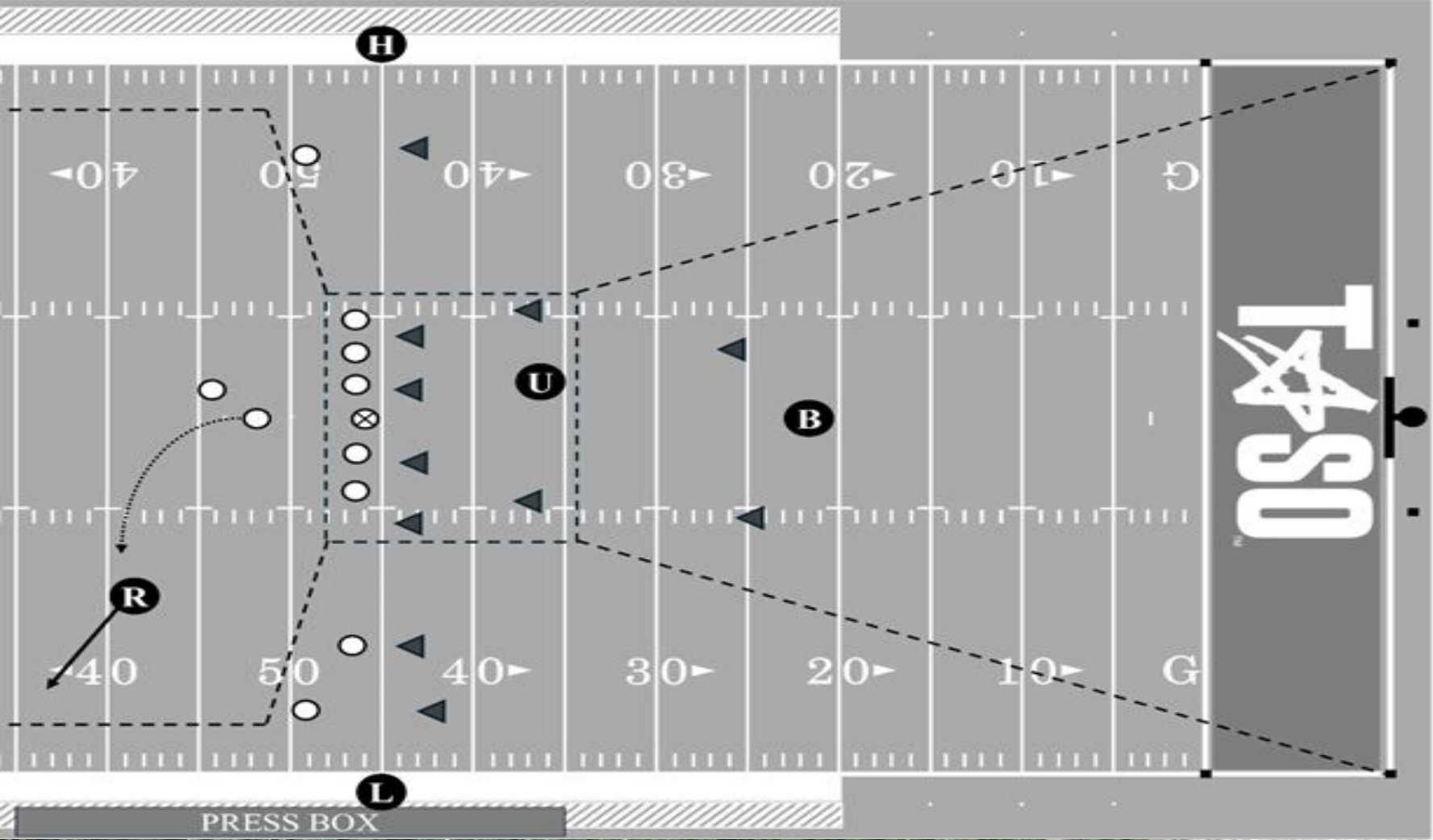


Double Tight End and Balanced Backfield

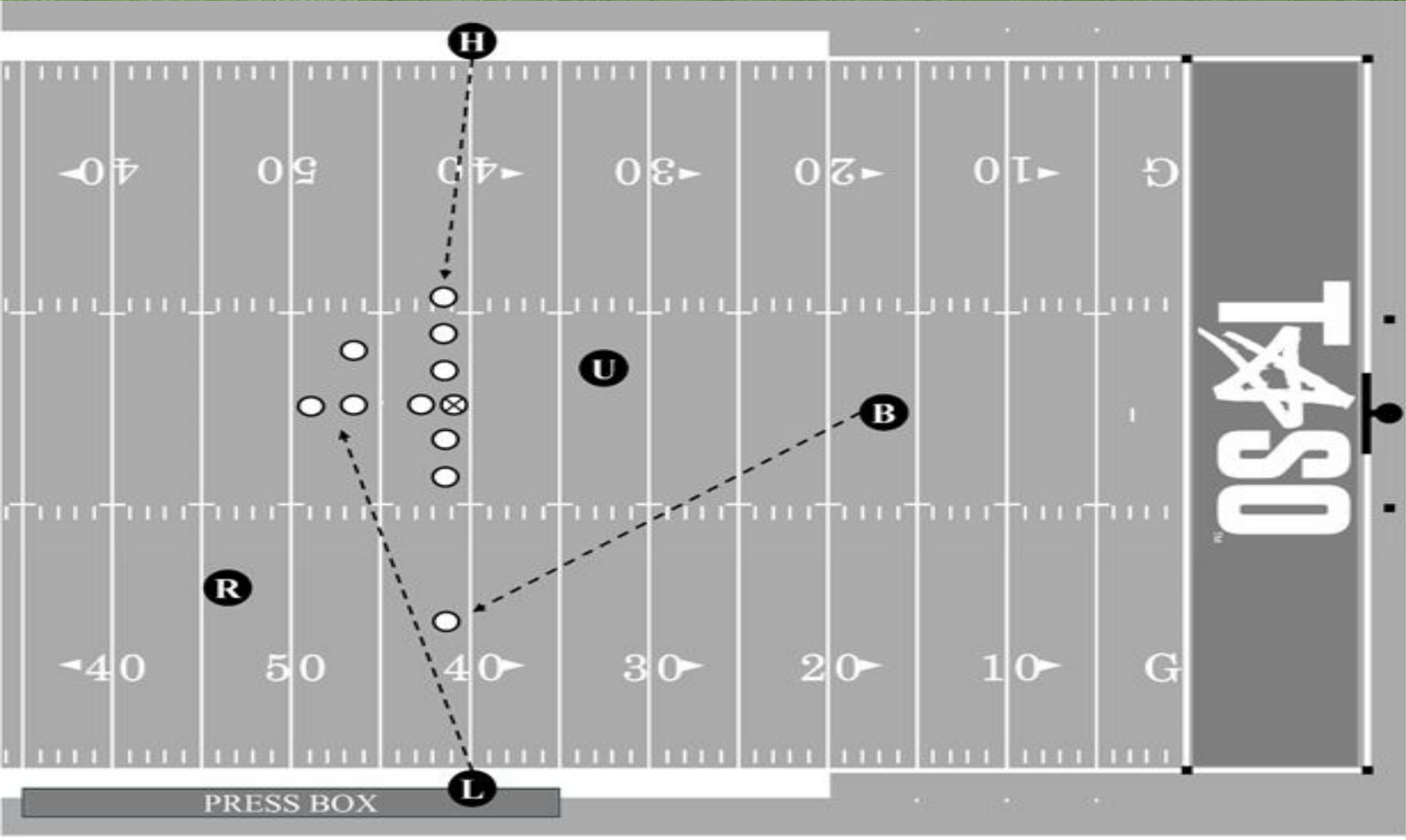
B will assist on the L's side when the formation is balanced.



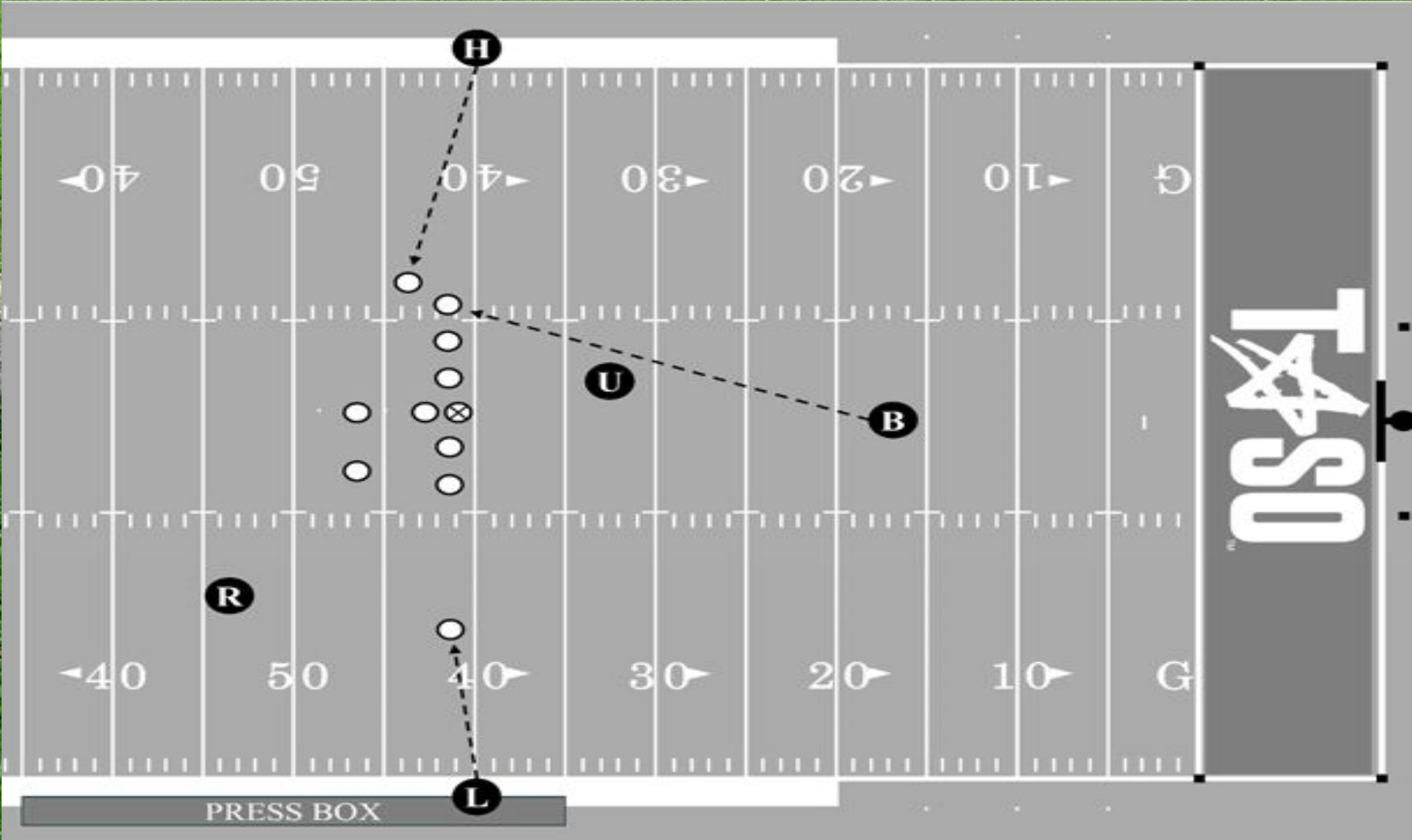
Crew of 5



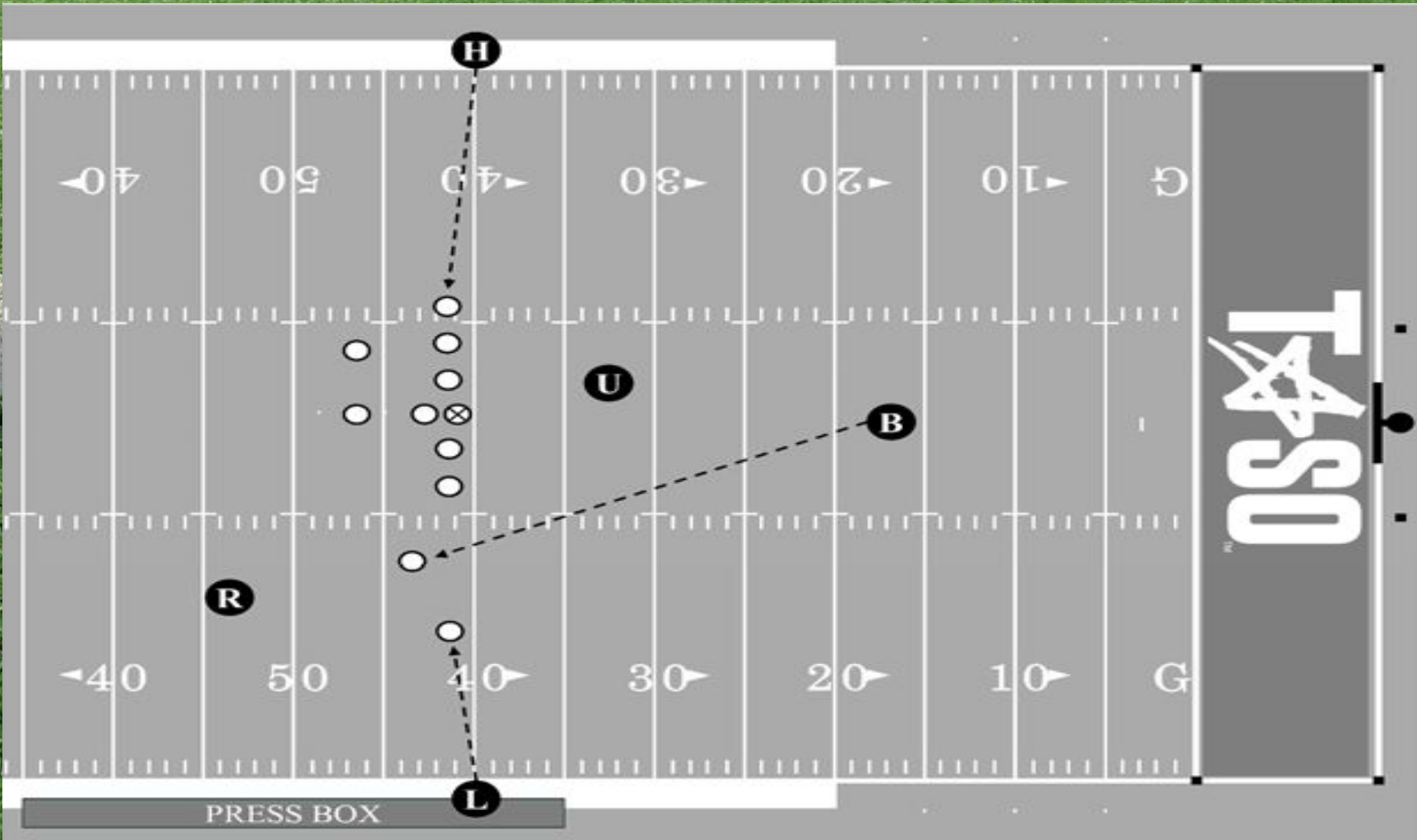
Crew of 5 Balanced



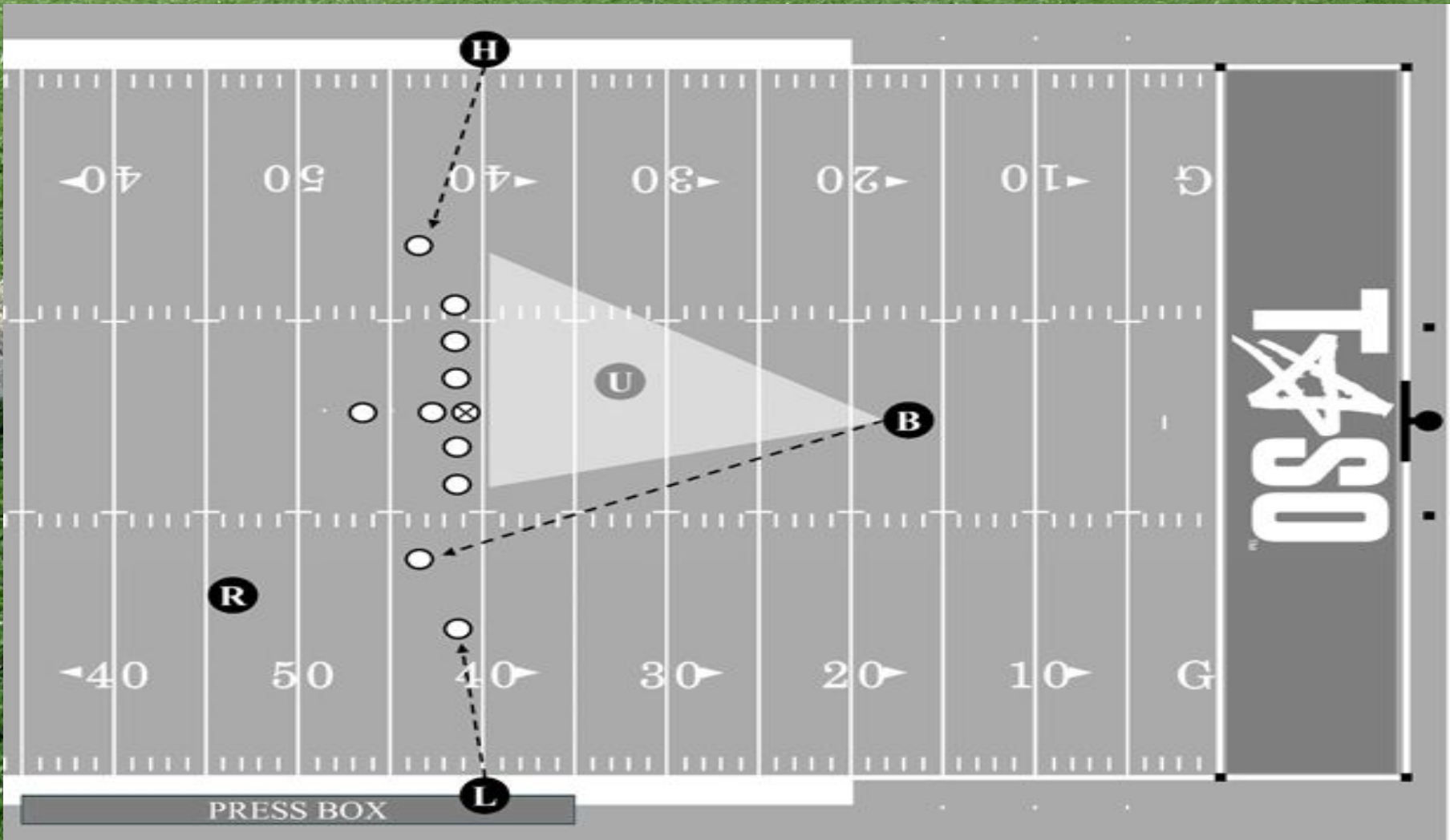
Crew of 5 Strength to H



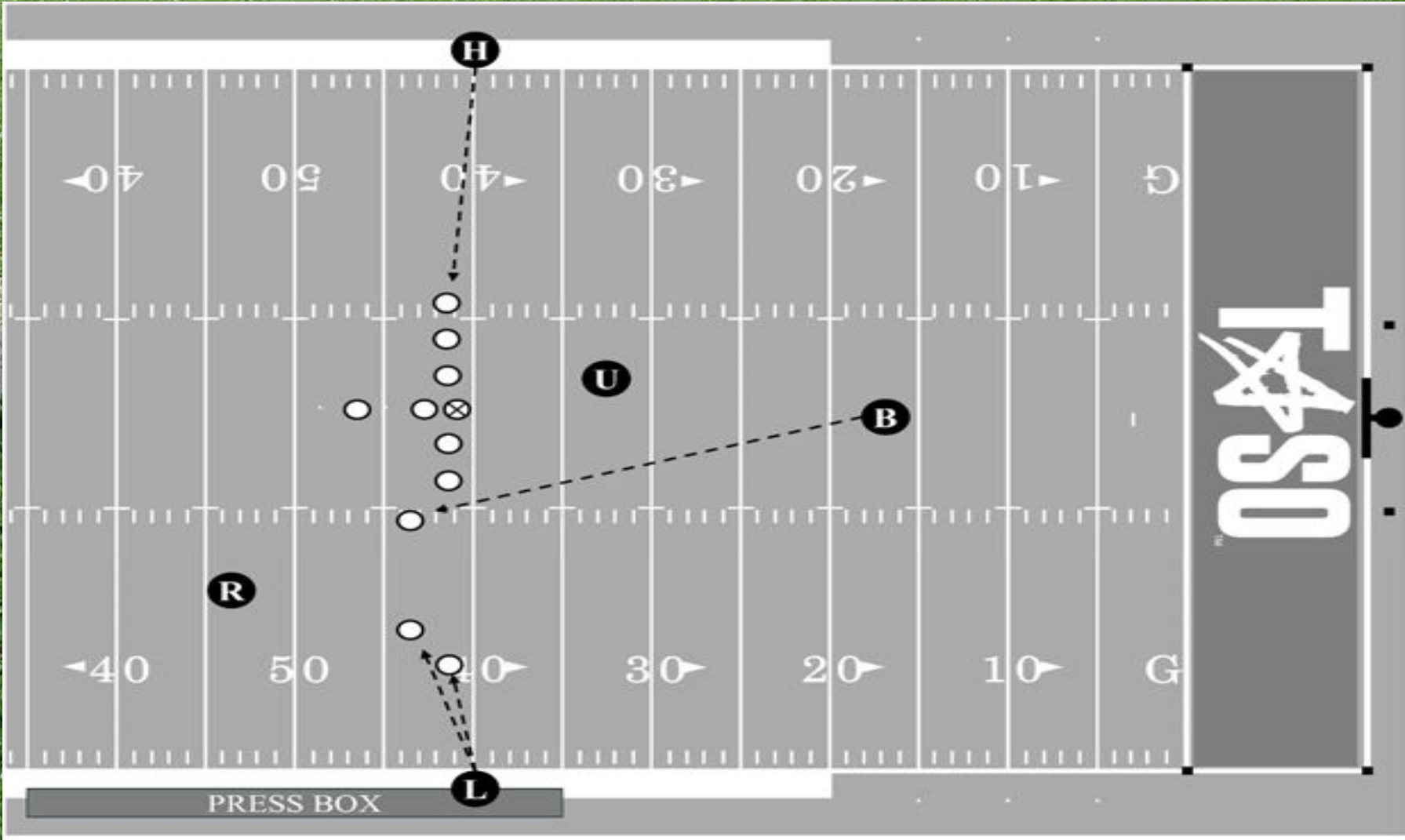
Crew of 5 Strength to L



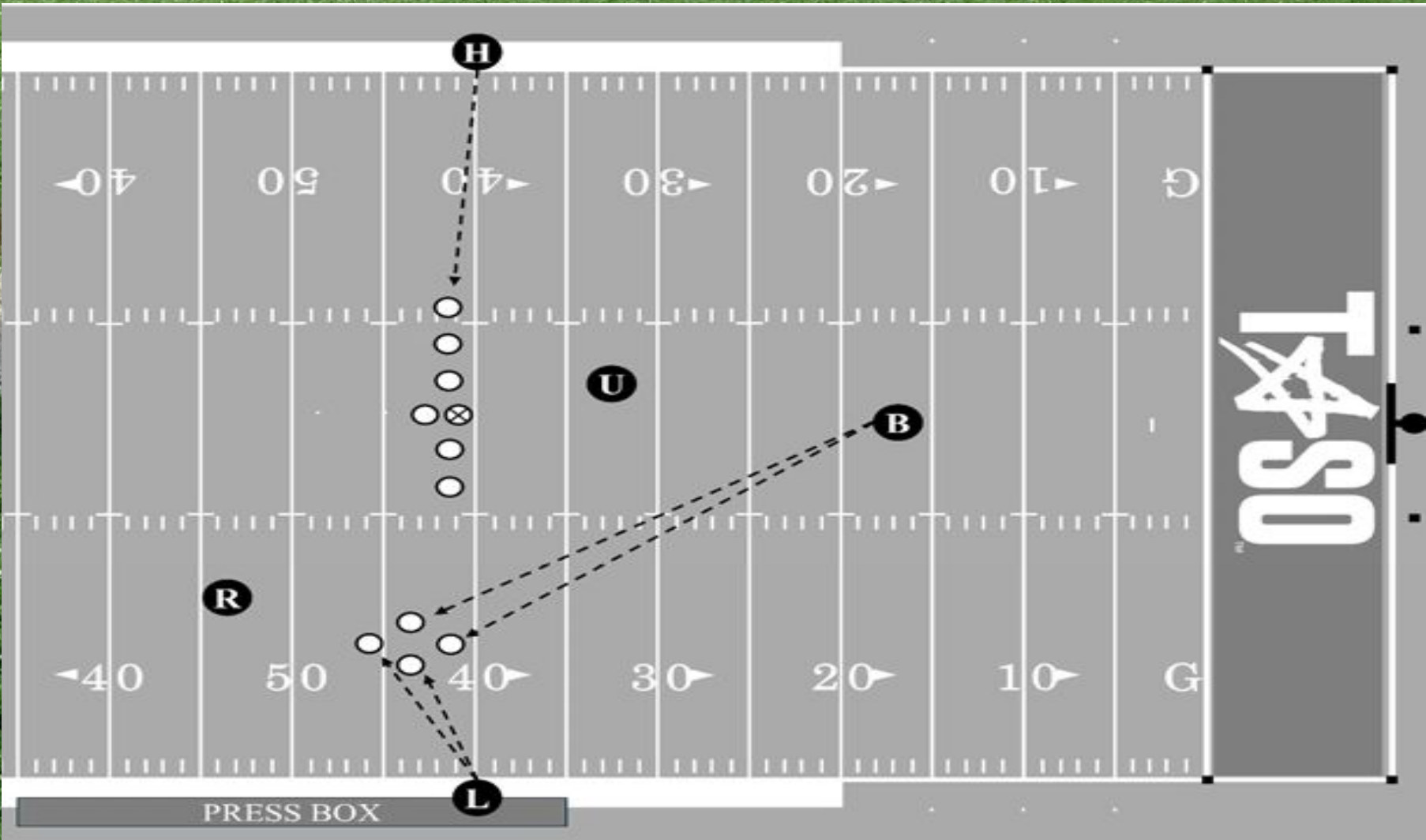
Crew of 5 Twins



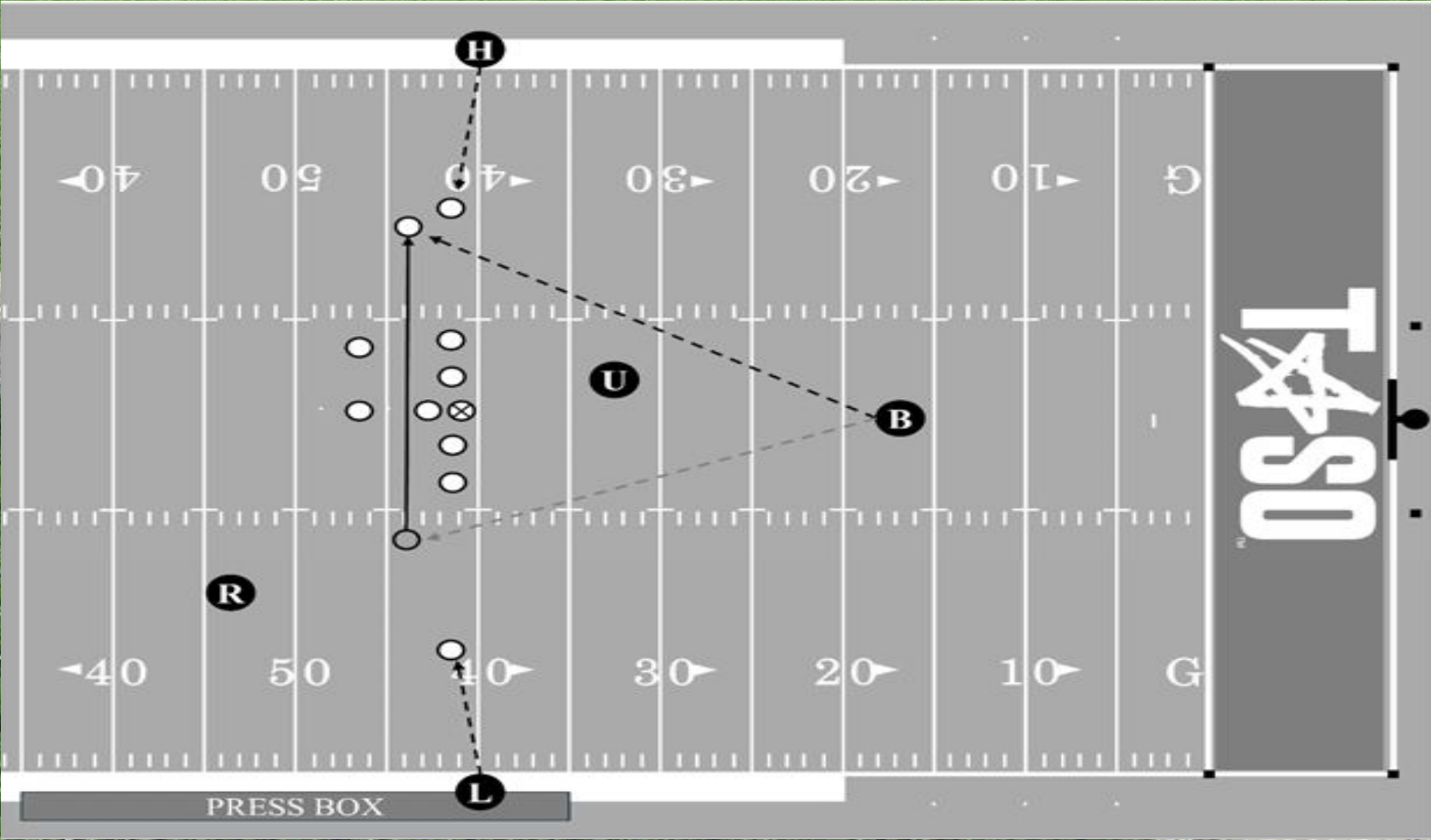
Crew of 5 Trips



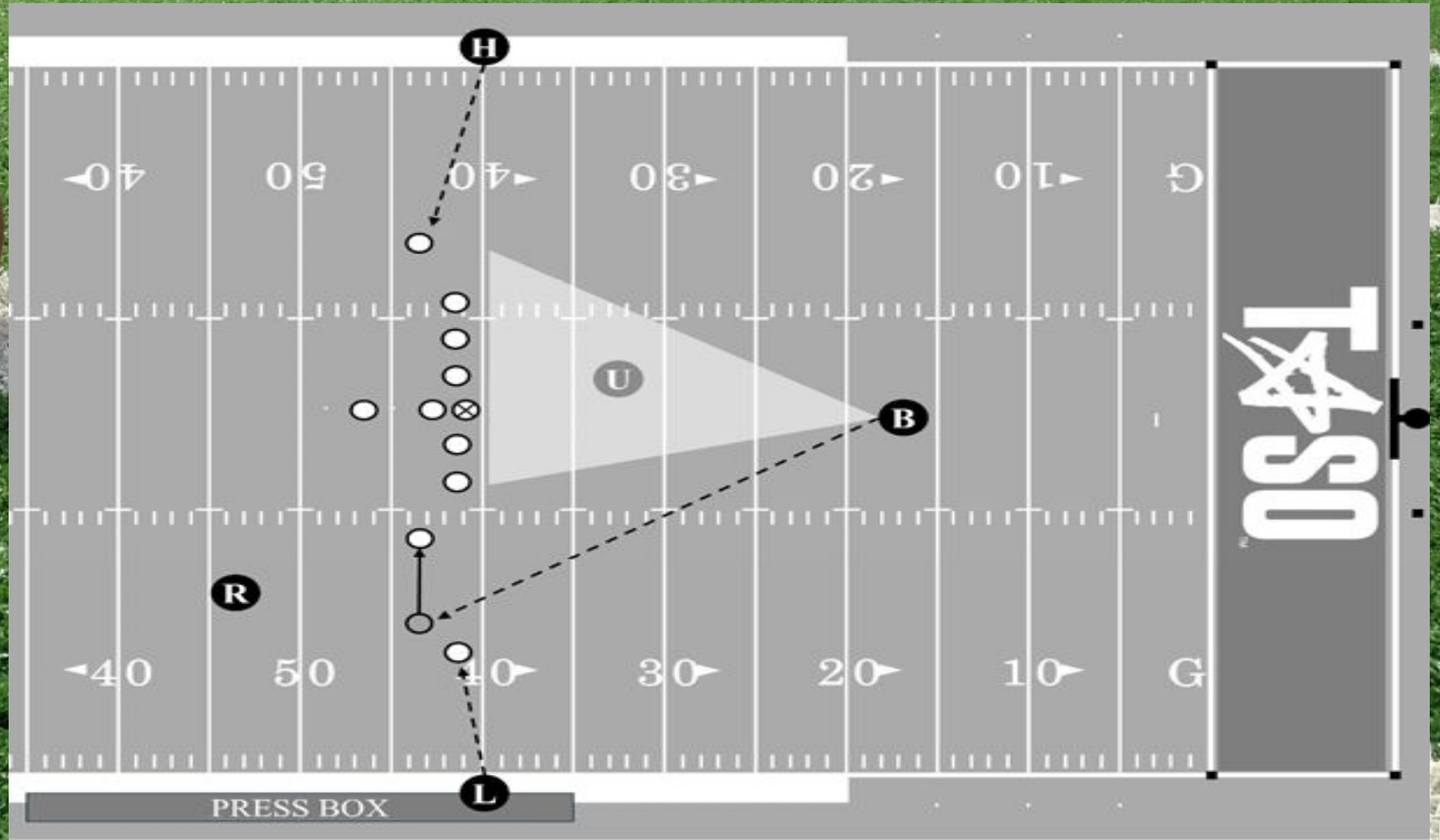
Crew of 5 Quads



Crew of 5 Motion Strength Change



Crew of 5 Motion No Strength Change





Passing Game

Mechanics Focus for Deep Officials

Discipline in keys, positioning, and eyes

Side Judge – S • Field Judge – F • Back Judge – B

Presenter: Charlie Hawkins



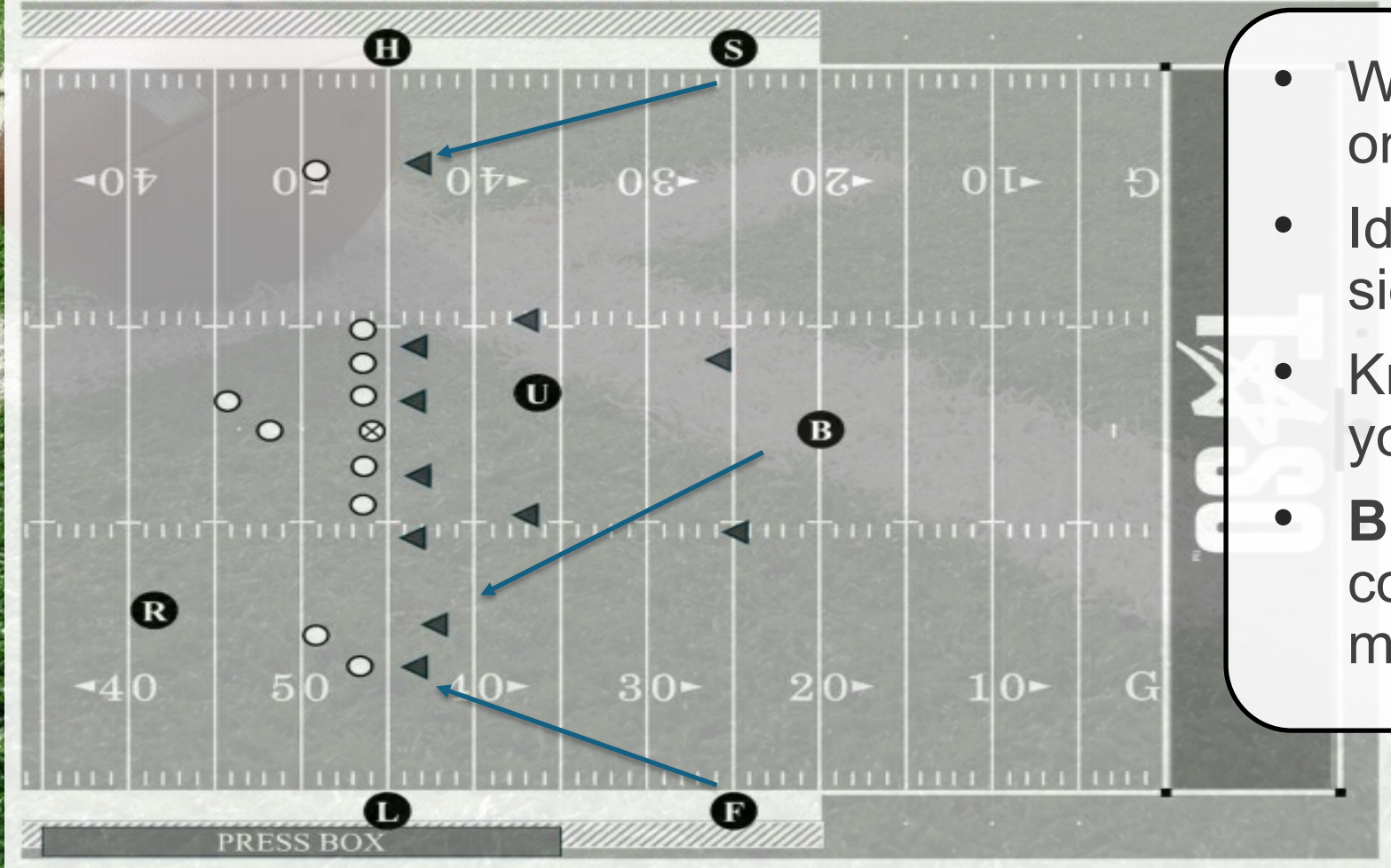
Pre-Snap Responsibilities



- Officiate dead-ball action at end of play
- Count Team B players and signal (thumbs up)
- Identify formation and key by position (**S / F / B**)
- Position 20 yards from LOS (**S / F**) & 25 yards (**B**)
- Know down, distance, clock awareness

Initial ‘Keys’ & Read Progression

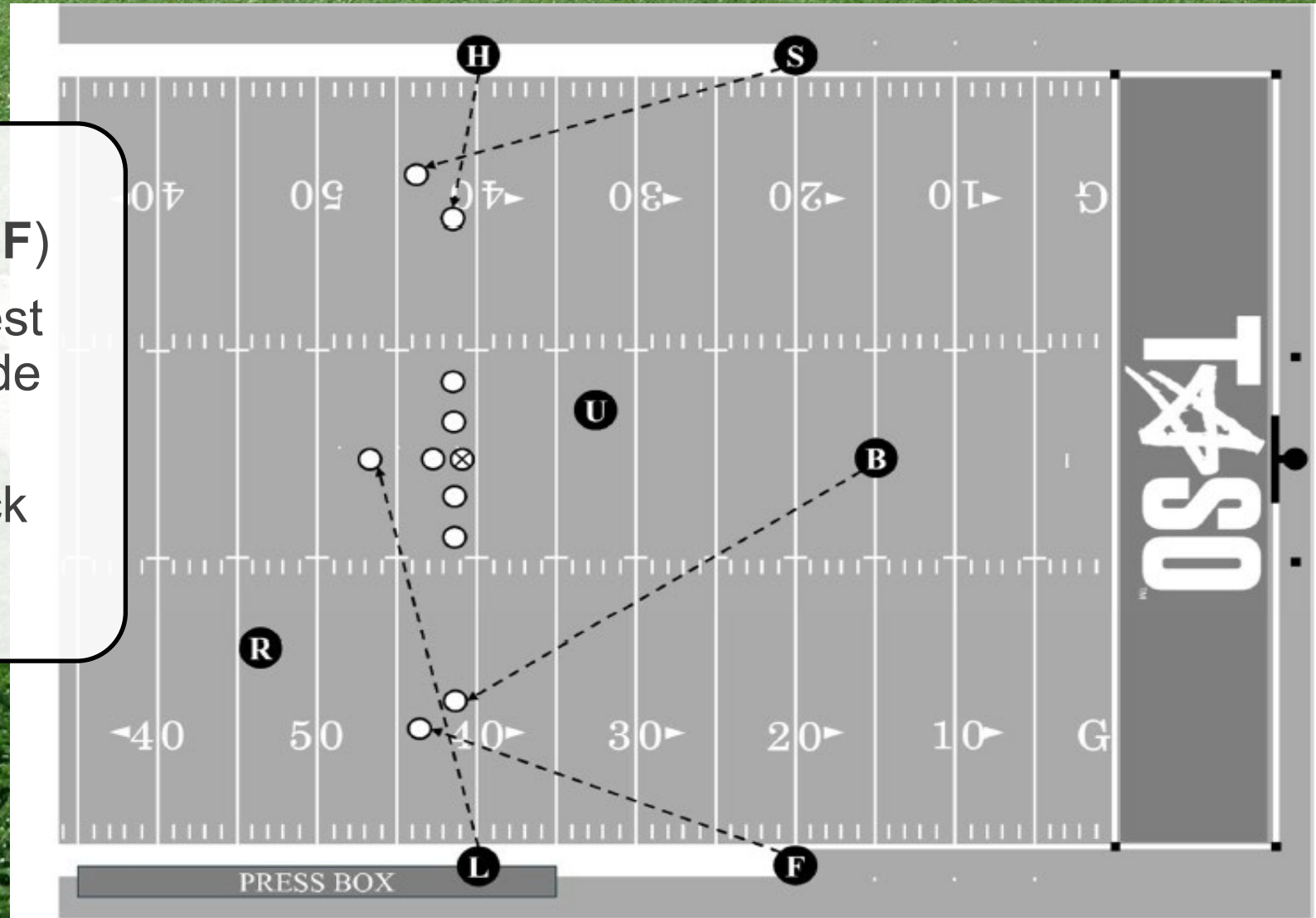
SECTION 12. PLAYS FROM SCRIMMAGE



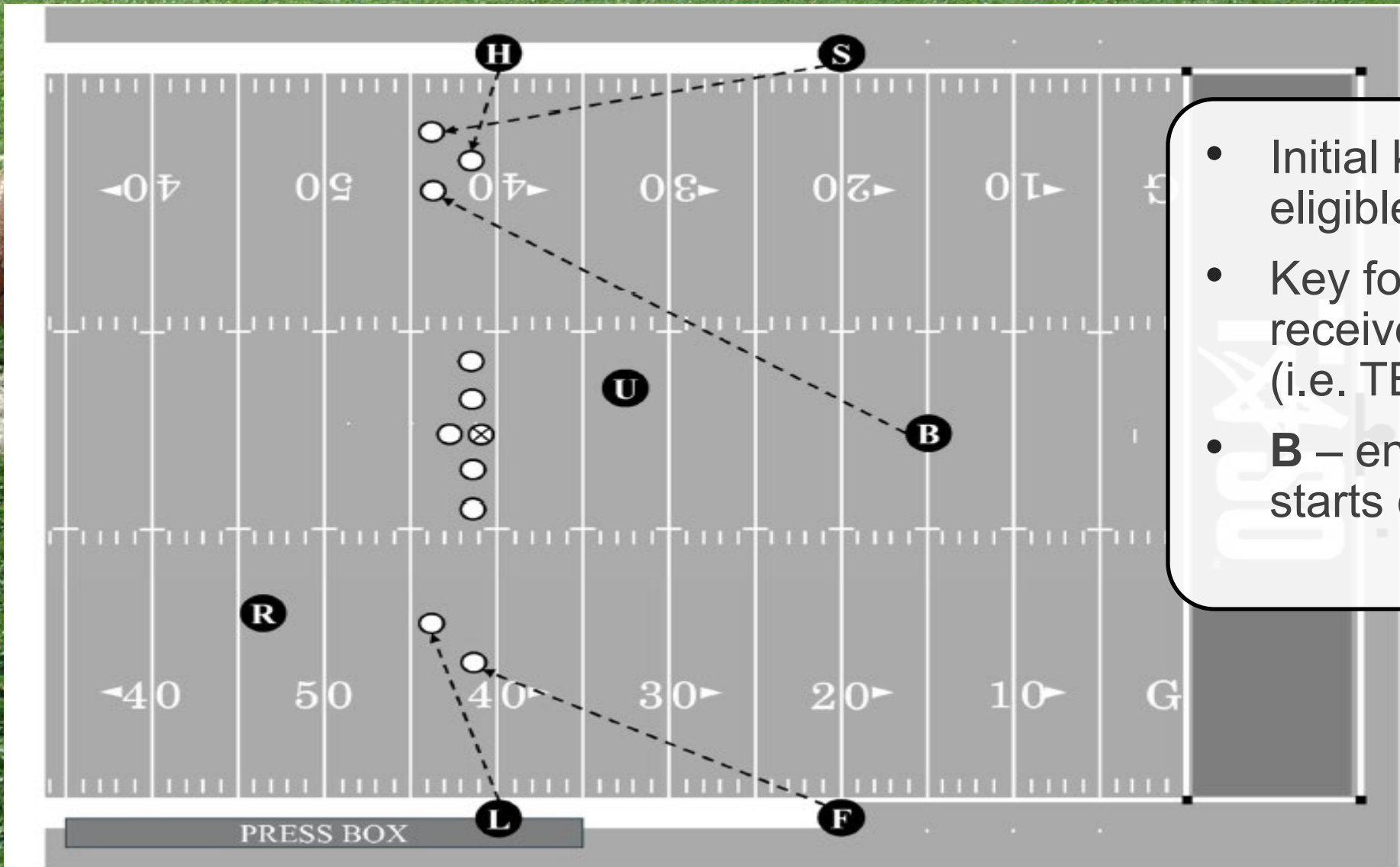
- Watch for “Hideout” players on sideline (**S / F**)
- Identify substitutions and signal - T with fists (**S / F**)
- Know eligible receivers to your sideline (**S / F**)
- **B** – ensure play clock starts correctly. Notice TE if movement off the LOS (**B**)

Initial "Keys" & Read Progression

- Initial key is widest eligible receiver (**S / F**)
- Key for **B** is 2nd widest receiver to strong side (i.e. TE, Slot)
- **B** – ensure play clock starts correctly

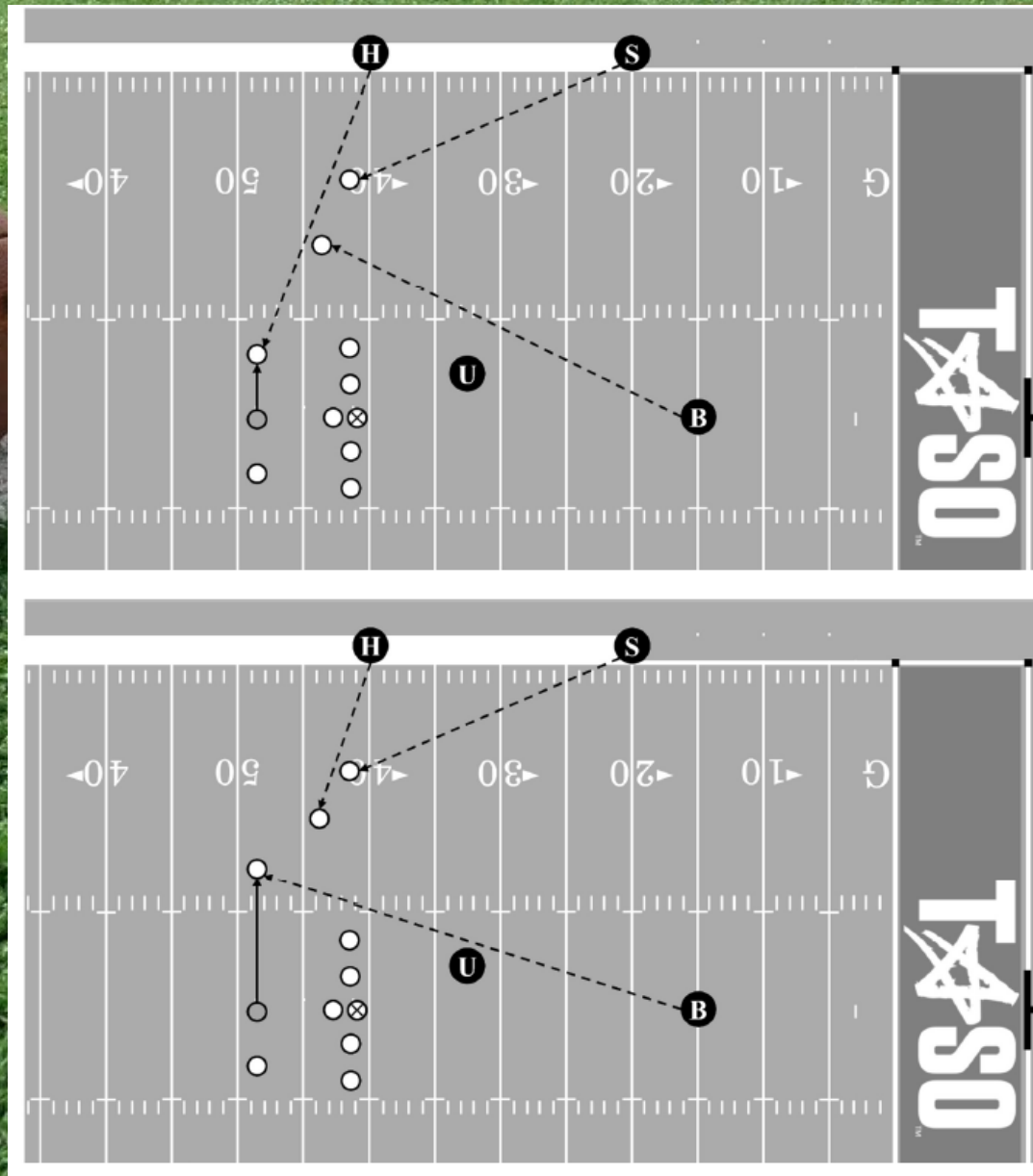


Initial 'Keys' & Read Progression



- Initial key is widest eligible receiver (**S / F**)
- Key for **B** is **inside** receiver to strong side (i.e. TE, Slot)
- **B** – ensure play clock starts correctly

Initial "Keys" & Read Progression



- Initial key is widest eligible receiver (**S / F**)
- Key for **B** is **inside** receiver to strong side (i.e. TE, Slot)
- **All** – Prepare for keys to change if Back motions outside tackle box

Pass Mechanics (ALL Deep Officials)

Primary Key → Zone → Ball

Stay on Key initially – especially if in “Press” coverage

Switch to Zone coverage when Receiver is off LOS and into routes

Switch to Ball coverage when pass is in the air

Pass Mechanics (Deep Officials: **S&F**)

Responsible for deepest routes along your sideline

Hat Off - means Receiver stepped OOB or doesn't return promptly

Officiate Catch, DPI / OPI, Holding, Receiver out of bounds

It's OK to talk to other Officials on close calls!

Maintain cushion – Help H/L with spot on long plays (O2O)



Pass Mechanics (Back Judge)

Responsible for deepest receiver routes

Run Backwards to officiate with eye contact, shoulders squared

Pivot hips, run while facing deepest route to maintain cushion

Officiate Catch, DPI / OPI, Holding, Crack back blocks

Beat Receiver to Goal Line EVERY TIME



Pass Mechanics (ALL Deep Officials)

B & F/S = Collaborate on sideline catches (Feet / Possession)

Crash to help on sideline when play ends out of bounds

Give clear end of play signals (stop clock / wind clock)

R appreciates O2O communication on deep plays – status

S & F – Shuttle ball from sideline on deep plays. Ball Mechanics



Pass Play – Goal Line

S / F: LOS is 25 – 7 yard line

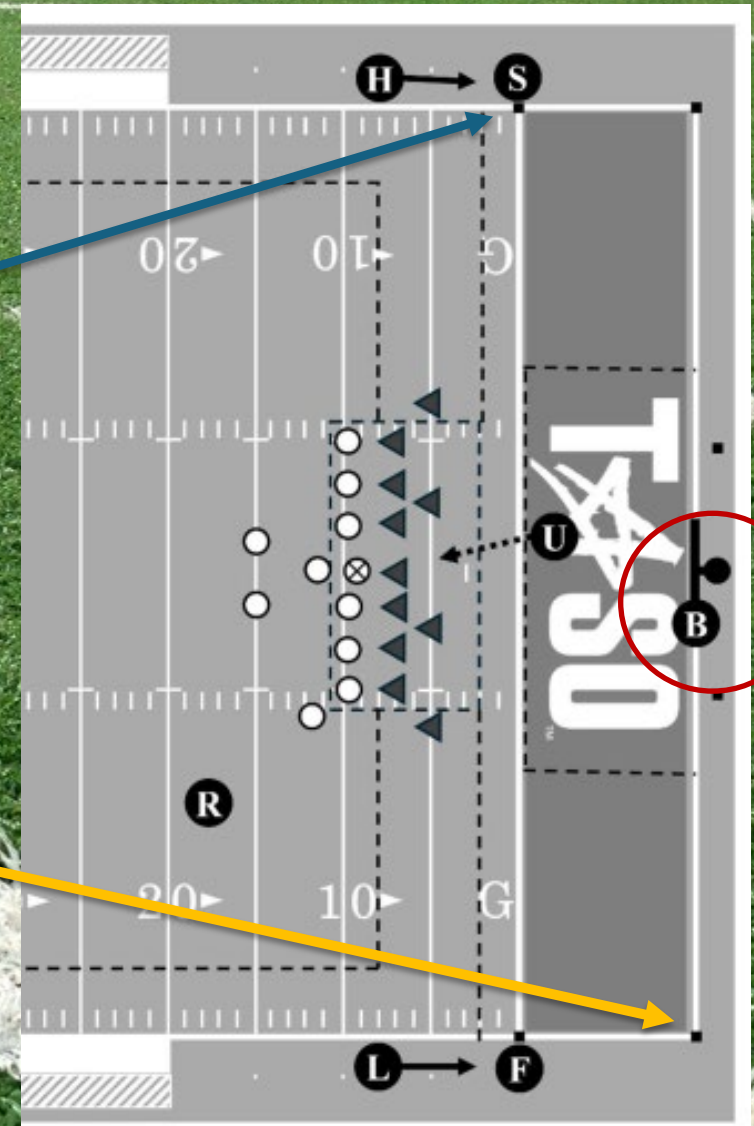
- **Goal Line Pylon**, a few steps off the sideline. 6 ft? 10 ft?

S / F: LOS inside the 7 yard line

- **End Line Pylon**

Back Judge Responsibility:

- LOS outside B-25, normal position
- LOS inside B-20, end-line



Pass Play – Goal Line (ALL Deep Officials)

See the ball break the plane of goal line, or player touch pylon or touch in EZ

Check with other officials before TD Signal
(One Signal!)

Ensure catch is maintained if sideline play ends out of bounds. “toe-tap reception”

Communicate on close calls to get it right

Signal TD – **AND** turn and to watch continued action (i.e. taunting, late hits, etc.)



Common DEEP Errors

- ✓ BALL WATCHING
- ✓ LOSING KEY TOO SOON
- ✓ TOO SHALLOW TOO EARLY
- ✓ POOR SIDELINE ANGLE
- ✓ FAILING TO OFFICATE BLOCKS

Officiate the PASS GAME, not just the throw!

