

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 [at the start of a play](#) — in other words which official has the primary duty to watch the ball and the ball carrier when they are 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 them.

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

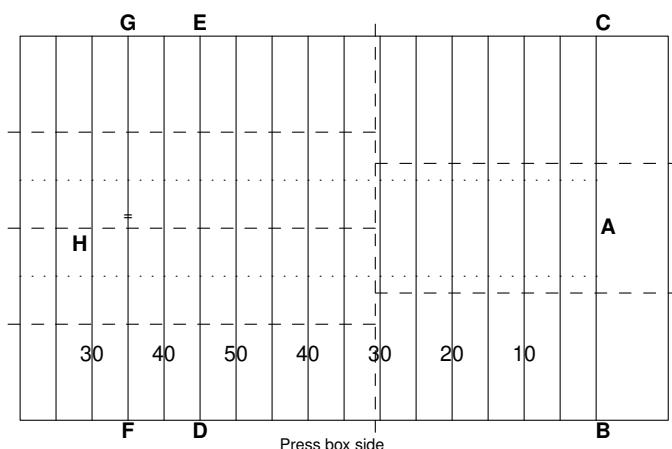
In each diagram, the position of the Referee (and Centre Judge if there is one) is based on the assumption that the quarterback is right-handed or the kicker is right-footed. If the quarterback is left-handed or the kicker is left-footed then the Referee should be in the mirror position to the left side ([Exceptions](#)†)

- [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] where the Referee should stay on the right-hand side of the formation and the Centre Judge on the left; and
- [IN 3x1/2x2/2x3 FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/6D/7)] where the Referee will need to be on the right on field goal attempts.

Note, however, that if a team suddenly changes quarterback or kicker, it is better for the Referee (and Centre Judge) to officiate from the "wrong" side than to try to swap over hurriedly.

26.1 - Basic free kick areas of responsibility

Figure A: The 8 basic free kick positions



The following table summarises which official is in which position according to the size of the crew and whether it is a normal or onside-kick.

Size	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	deep centre	pylon PB	pylon OP	TB RL PB	TB RL OP	TA RL PB	TA RL OP	with kicker
Normal								
3	R				D	L		
4		L	R		D	U		
5		L	R		D	B		U
6C	R	L	D		C	B		U
6D	R	L	D		S	F		U
7	R	L	D	F	S	B		U
8	R	L	D	F	S	B	C	U
Onside-kick								
3	R				D	L		
4	R				D	L		U
5	R			L	D	B		U
6C	R			L	D	B	C	U
6D	R			L	D	F	S	U
7		L	R	F	D	B	S	U
8	R	L	D	F	S	B	C	U

RL = restraining line; PB = press box side; OP = opposite press box; TA = Team A; TB = Team B

Figure B: Crew of 4 (normal positions)

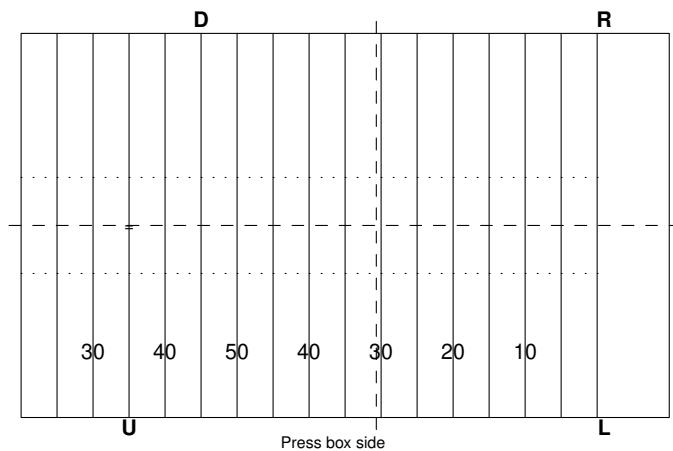


Figure C: Crew of 4 (onside-kick positions)

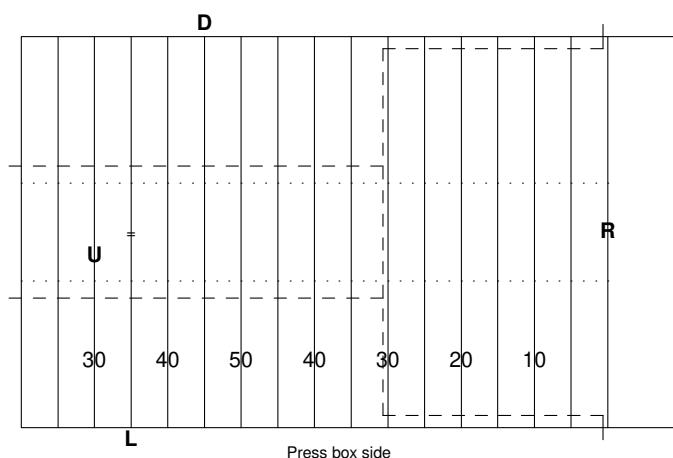


Figure D: Crew of 5 (normal positions)

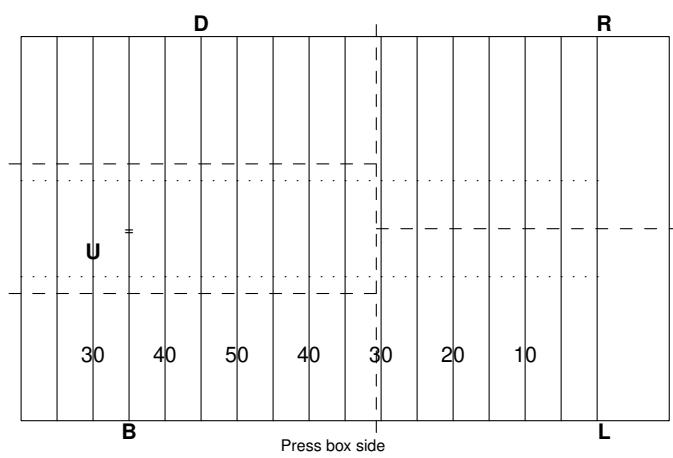


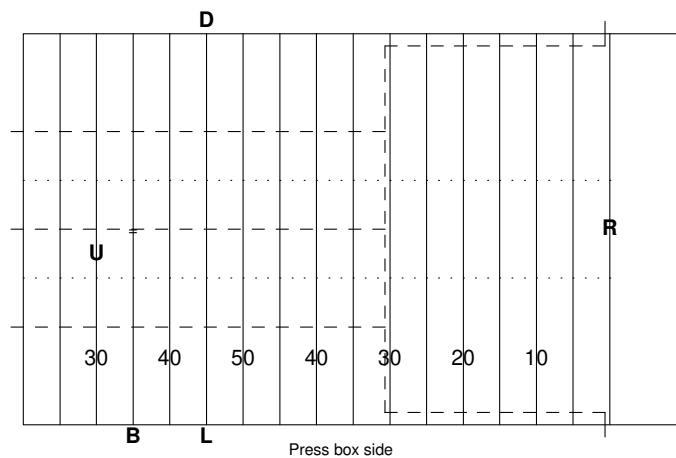
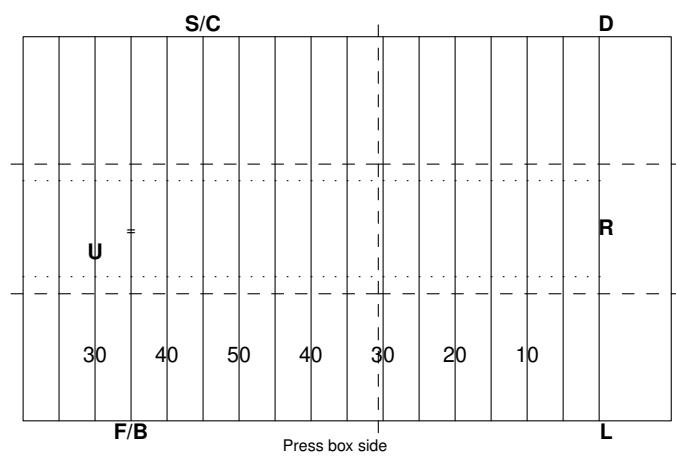
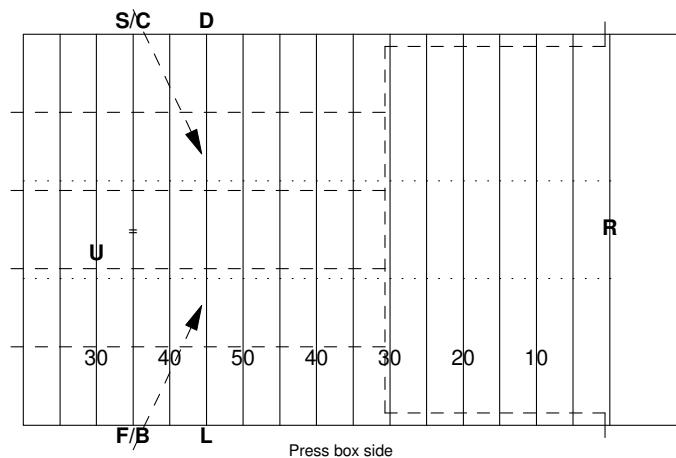
Figure E: Crew of 5 (onside-kick positions)**Figure F: Crew of 6 (normal positions)****Figure G: Crew of 6 (onside-kick positions)**

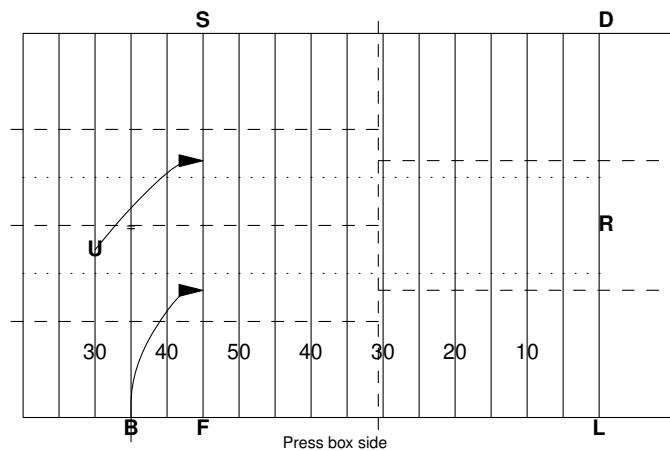
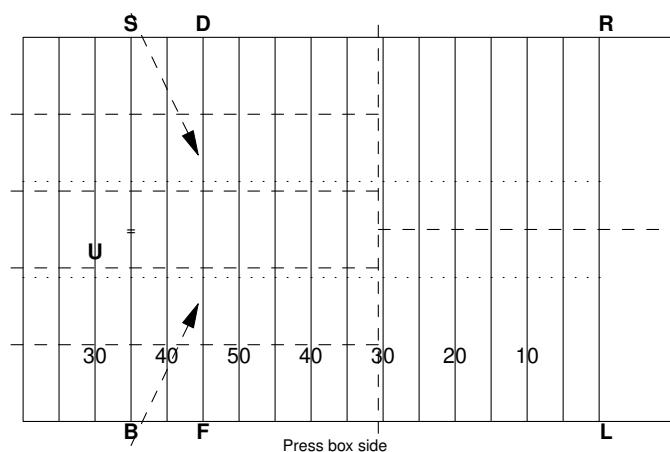
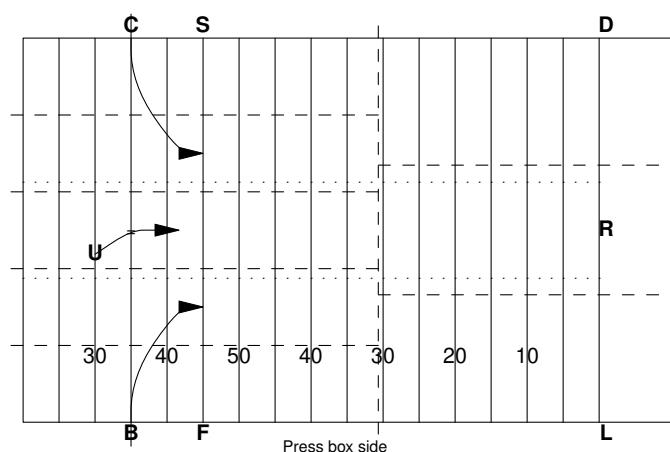
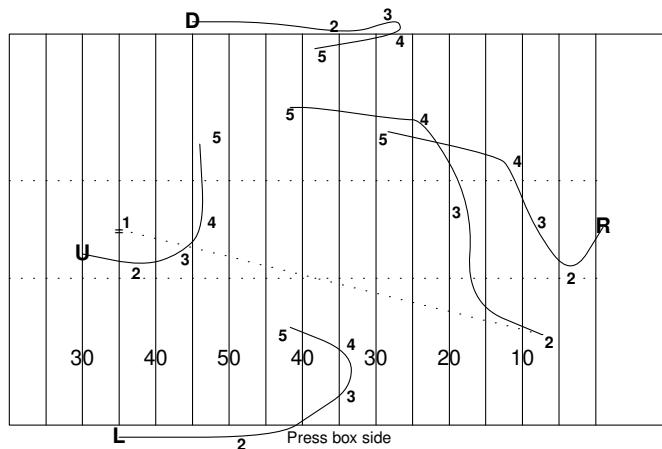
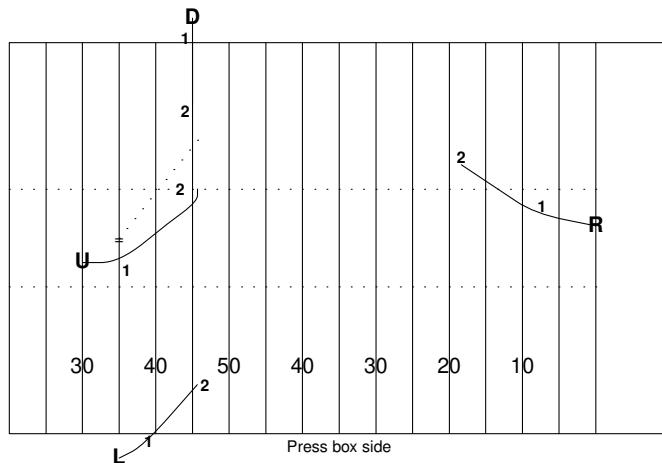
Figure H: Crew of 7 (normal positions)**Figure I: Crew of 7 (onside-kick positions)****Figure J: Crew of 8 (both normal and onside-kick positions)**

Figure K: Example play (Crew of 4, 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 they watch 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 they are in their area. As the returner runs across the field (3), the officials adjust their positions to keep the play boxed in. The Down Judge and Umpire observe lead blocks on the return until the ball carrier moves into the Down Judge's area of coverage (4). At this point the Down Judge 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 L: Example play (Crew of 4, onside-kick positions) short kick to Down Judge's side of the field



When the officials see that the ball has been kicked short (1), the Down Judge, 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 Down Judge 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: Crew of 4

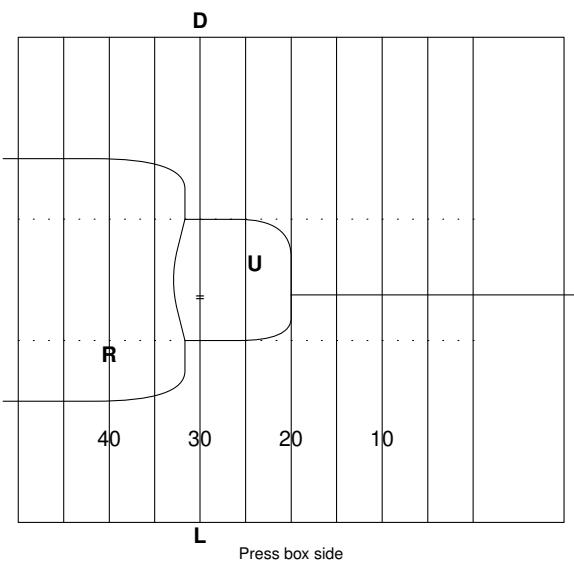


Figure B: Crew of 5/6C

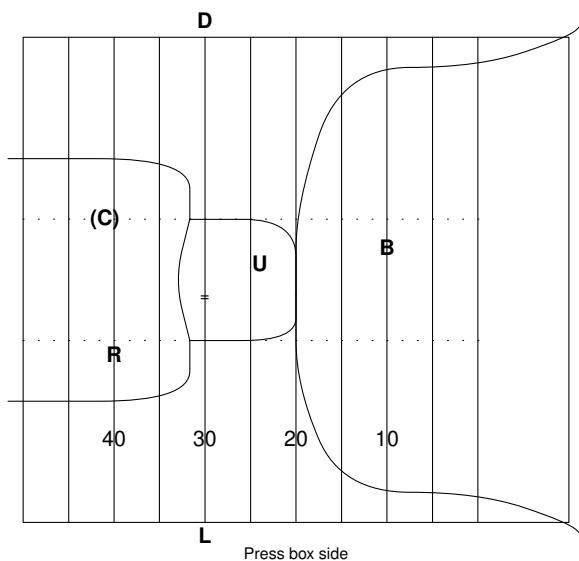
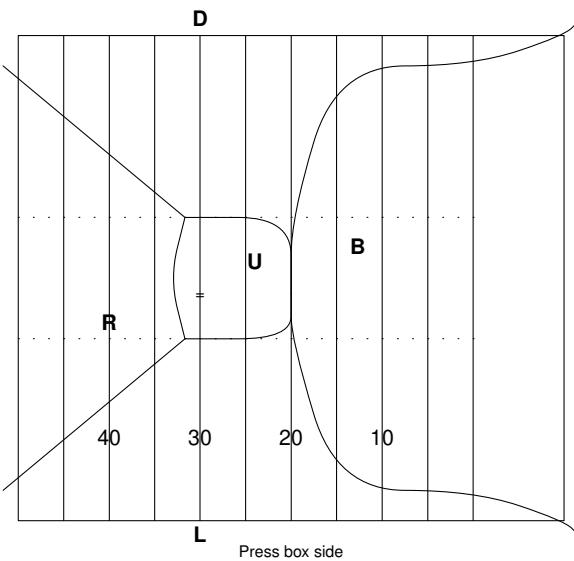


Figure C: Crew of 5 (pass play coverage zones)



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 destination of any forward pass.

Figure D: Crew of 6D

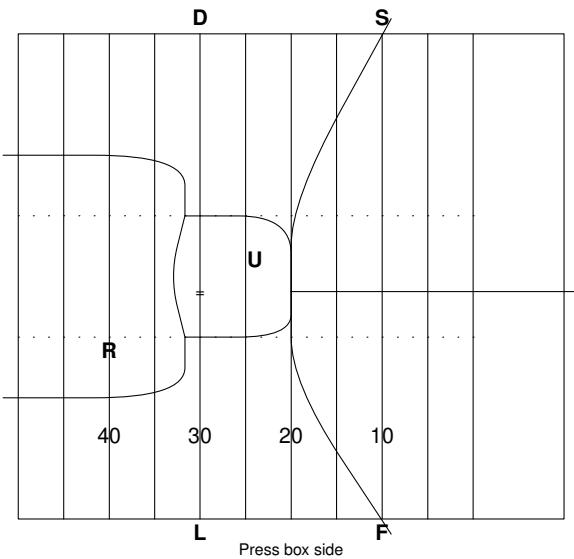


Figure E: Crew of 7

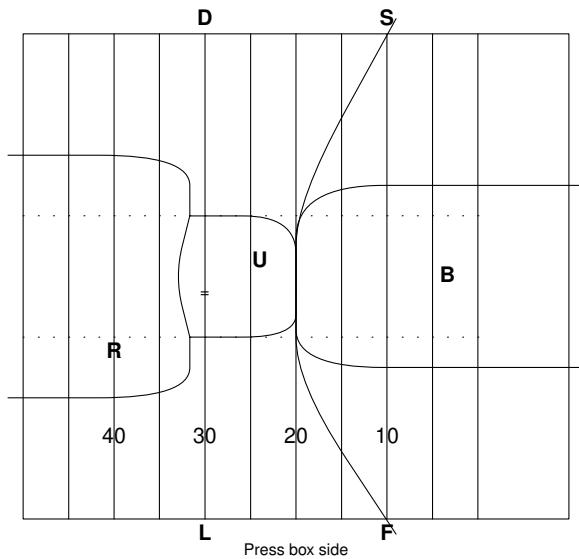
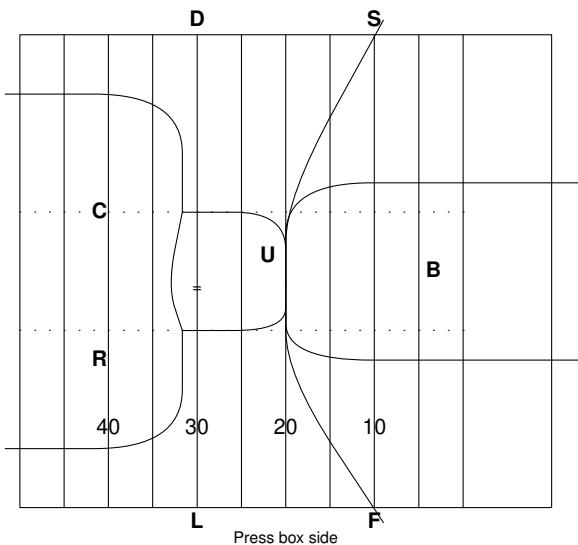
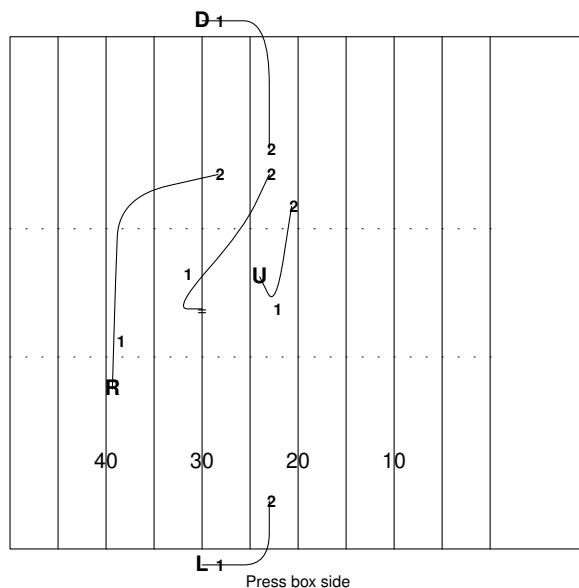
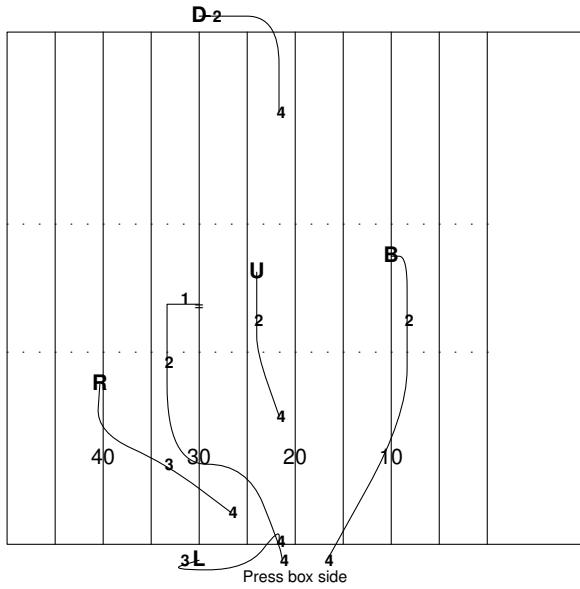
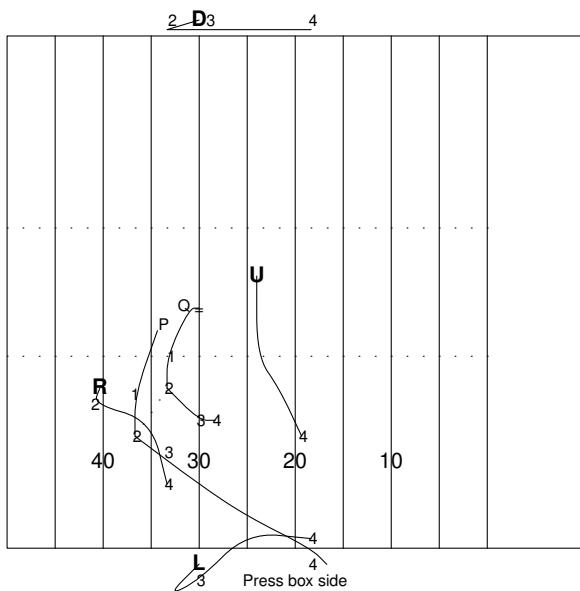


Figure F: Crew of 8**Figure G: Example play (Crew of 4) run up the middle of the field**

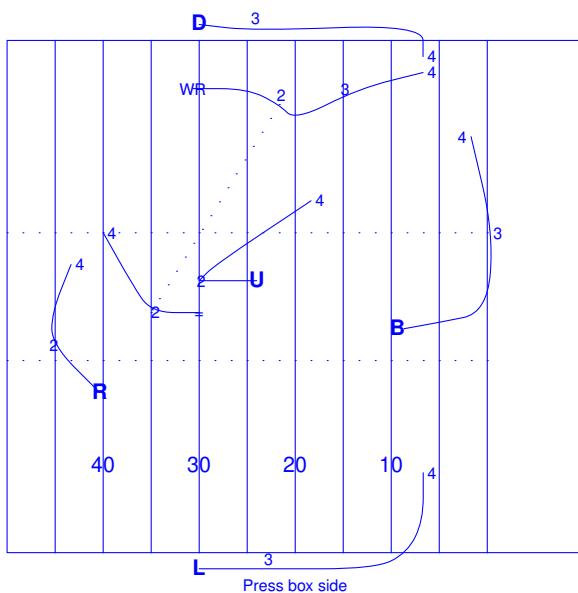
As the play develops (1), the Umpire moves back and laterally to stay away from the hole at the point of attack. As the ball carrier approaches the neutral zone, the **Down Judge** takes over responsibility for them and moves to the dead-ball spot when they are tackled (2) to mark the forward progress.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

Figure H: Example play (Crew of 5) sweep to Line Judge's side of the field

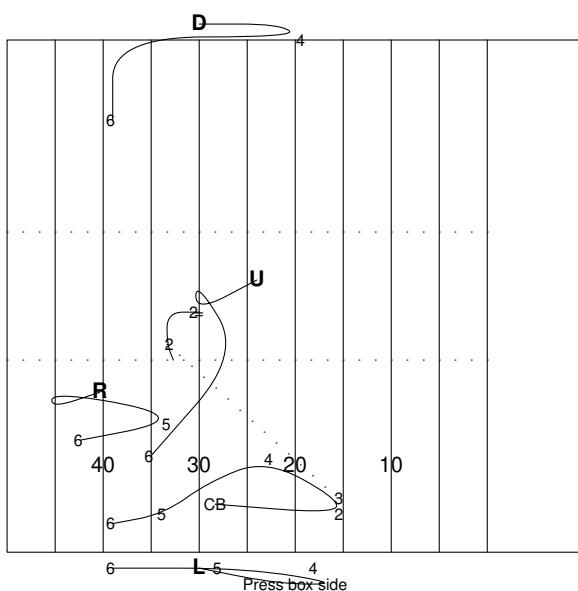
At the snap (1) the officials read their keys to determine what the play is. Once it is determined to which side of the field the play is being run (2), the Line Judge makes sure they are well out of the way and the Back Judge moves across the field to observe lead blocks. The Umpire turns and watches the play from the inside. When the ball carrier turns up field (3), responsibility for them 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 either going into the team area if necessary. The Umpire moves downfield to cover action around and ahead of the ball carrier. Throughout the play the **Down Judge** is responsible for action in the centre of the field behind the Referee and Umpire.

Figure I: Example play (Crew of 4) pitchout option play

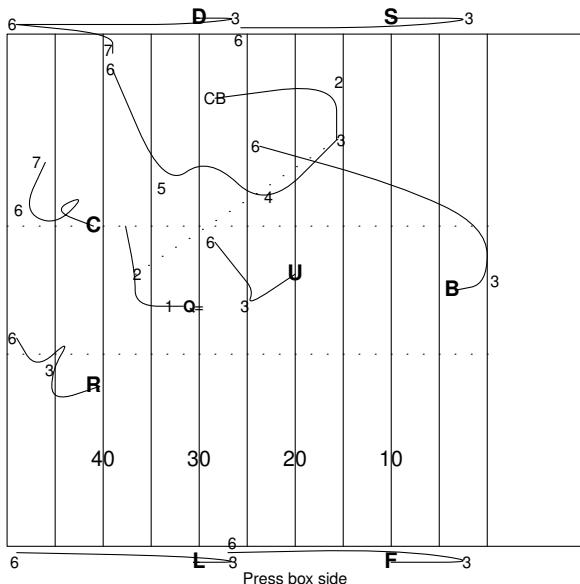
The Referee maintains coverage as the quarterback (Q) rolls out to the Line Judge's side of the field (1). The Line Judge steps into the backfield to observe the trailing back (P). If the ball is pitched to the outside back (2) the Referee watches for continuing action against the quarterback while the 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 them. The **Down Judge** 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 J: Example play (Crew of 5) pass downfield to Down Judge'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 stay on the line of scrimmage until they are confident a pass is going to be thrown that will definitely cross the neutral zone.[◊] The Back Judge moves back to keep the potential receivers between themselves and the wing officials. When the quarterback throws the ball (2) the Referee must continue to watch them 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 **Down Judge** and Back Judge also watch the receiver and those around them for illegal action. After the pass is complete and the ball carrier is progressing downfield they are the **Down Judge's** responsibility (3). Other officials watch the action around the ball and the Referee cleans up any action remaining around the line of scrimmage. When the ball carrier is tackled (4), the **Down Judge** 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 K: Example play (Crew of 4) 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 stay on the line of scrimmage. At the time the pass is thrown (2) the Line Judge and **Down Judge** 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 corner back (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 **Down Judge** observes action away from the ball and helps with forward progress.

Figure L: Example play (Crew of 8) interception return

All the officials read pass (1), and the Referee and Centre Judge retreat to stay clear of the passer as they drop back, while the Umpire steps up a few yards. The Down Judge and Line Judge hold the line of scrimmage, while the deep officials drop back as receivers run downfield. When the pass is thrown (2), all wing and deep officials attempt to identify the destination of the pass. The pass is intercepted by the cornerback (CB) (3). At this point, all officials switch to reverse mechanics in order to cover the return. The Referee, Centre Judge, Down Judge and Line Judge all need to stay ahead of the ball carrier during the return (4). The three deep officials have a lot of ground to make up, especially the Side Judge who has primary responsibility for the ball carrier as they weave around the field (5). When the ball carrier is tackled (6), preferably the Side Judge will mark the forward progress spot, but since they are delayed in doing so, the Down Judge moves to mark it (7). The other officials keep the end of the play boxed in, and watch peripheral players for late contact.

26.3 - Basic goal line responsibilities

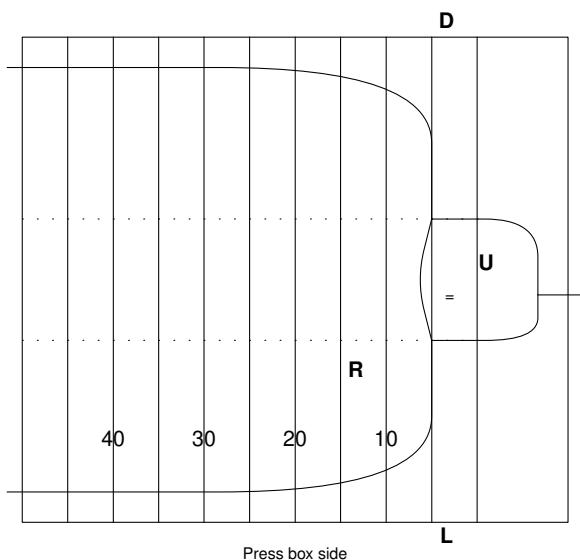
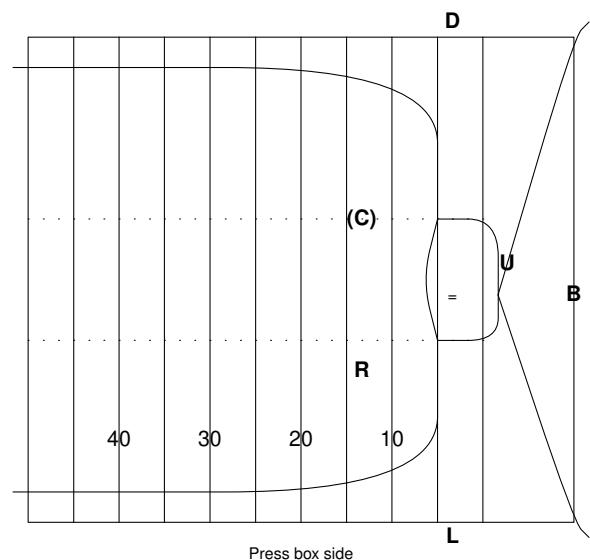
Figure A: Crew of 4**Figure B: Crew of 5/6C**

Figure C: Crew of 6D

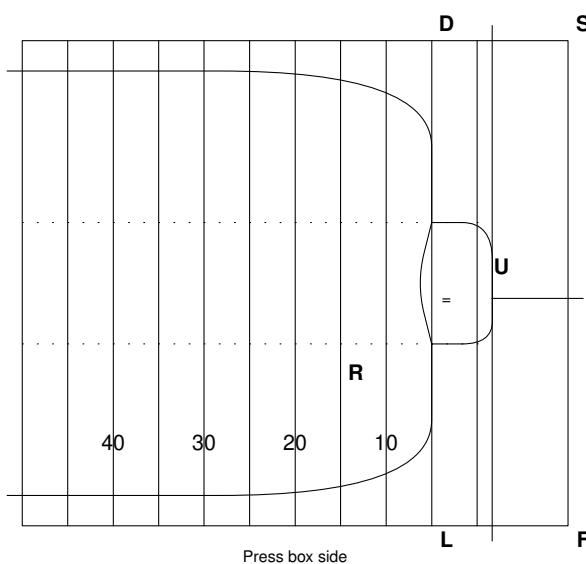


Figure E: Crew of 7/8 (ball between 7 & 20-yard lines)

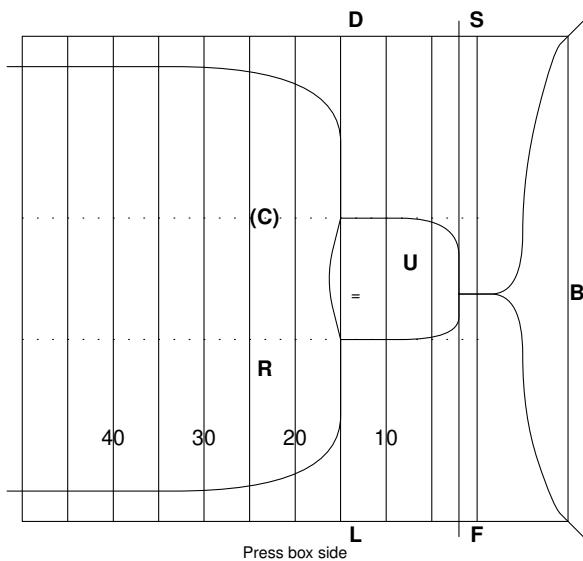


Figure D: Crew of 7/8 (ball outside 20-yard line)

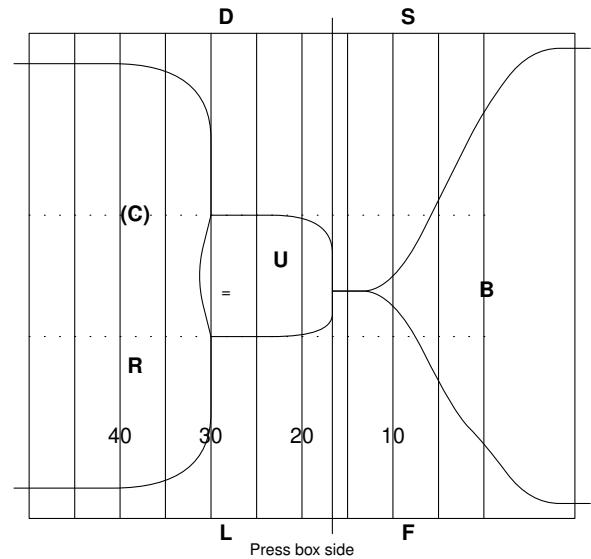
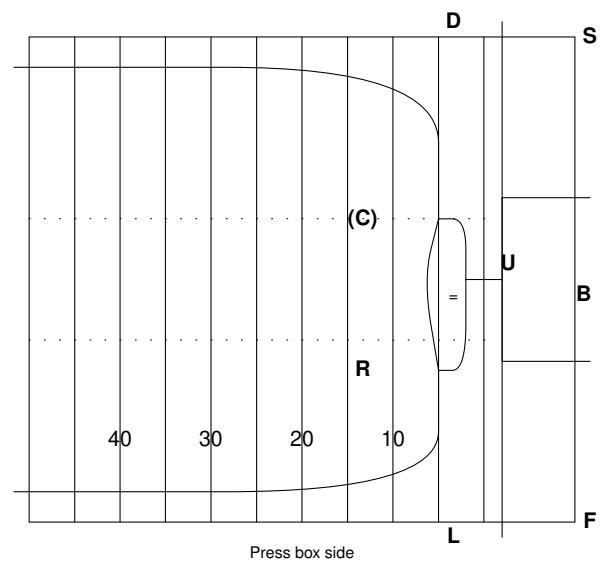


Figure F: Crew of 7/8 (ball inside 7-yard line)



26.4 - Basic punt responsibilities

Figure A: Crew of 4

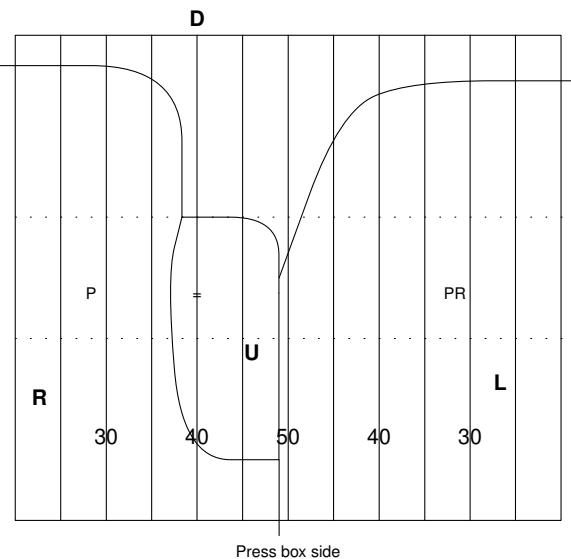


Figure B: Crew of 5/6C

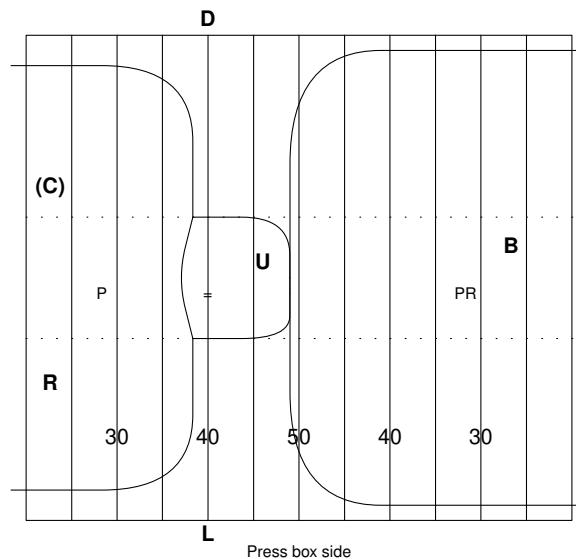


Figure C: Crew of 6D

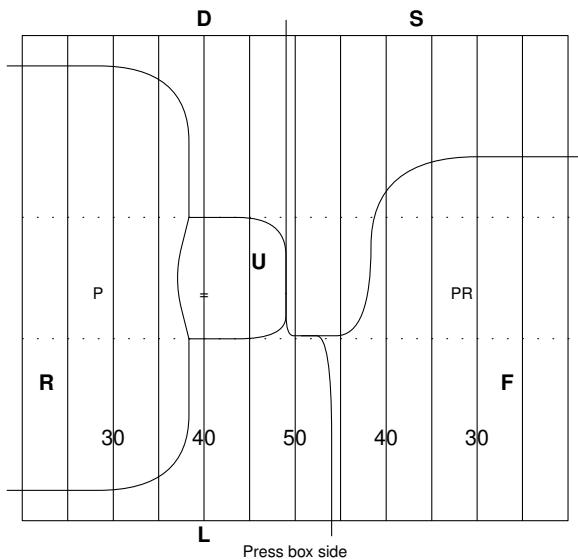


Figure D: Crew of 7/8

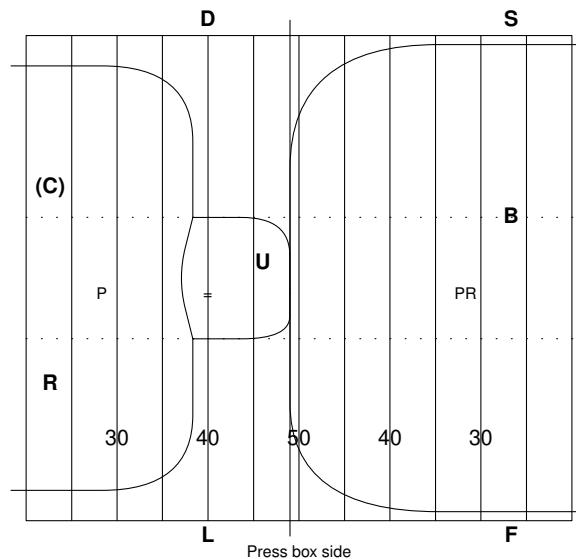
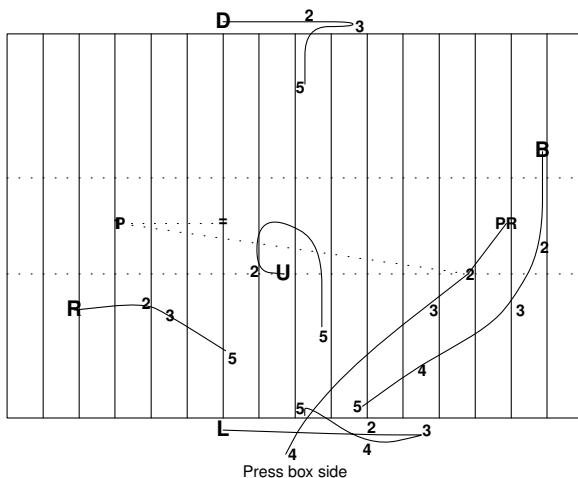


Figure E: Example play (Crew of 5) punt return



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 until they are approximately 15-20 yards ahead of the return. The Back Judge remains behind the deep receiver so that they can observe the catch (2), and then blocks in front of the returner (3). The Line Judge follows the ball carrier until they go 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 [Down Judge](#) 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: Crew of 4

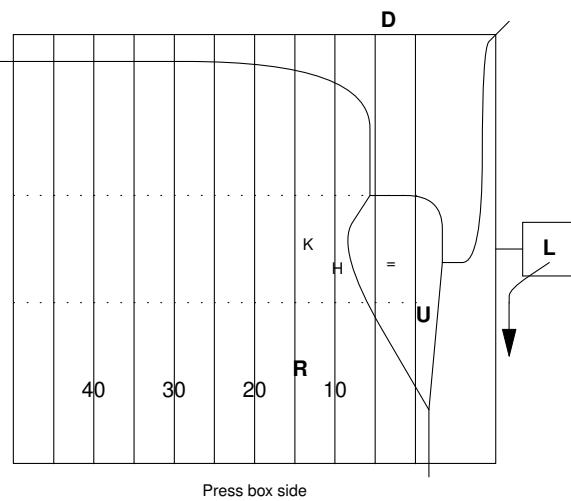


Figure B: Crew of 5

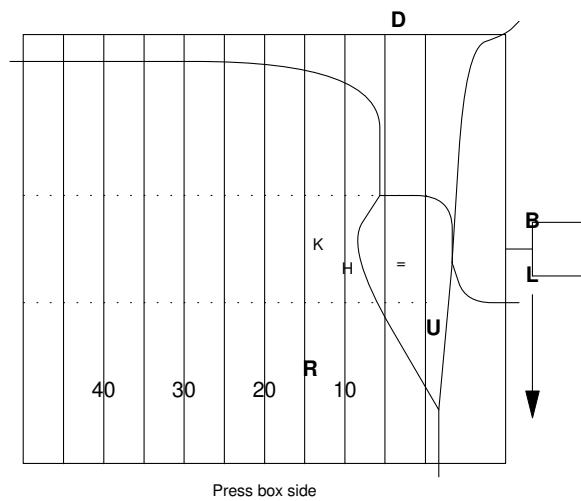


Figure C: Crew of 6D

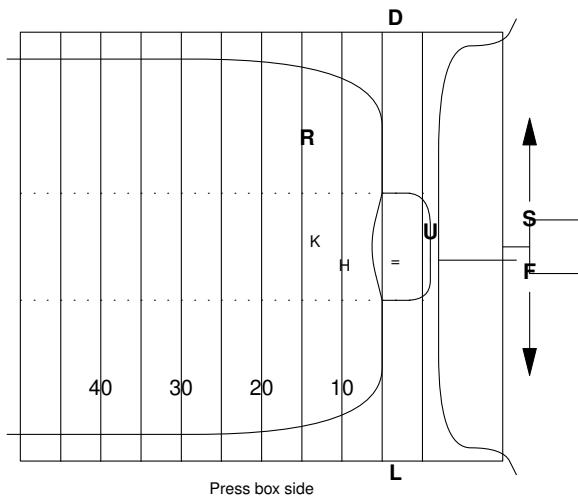


Figure D: Crew of 6C

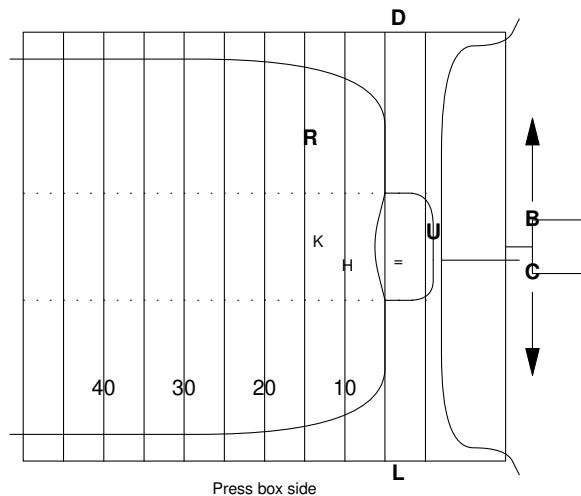


Figure E: Crew of 7

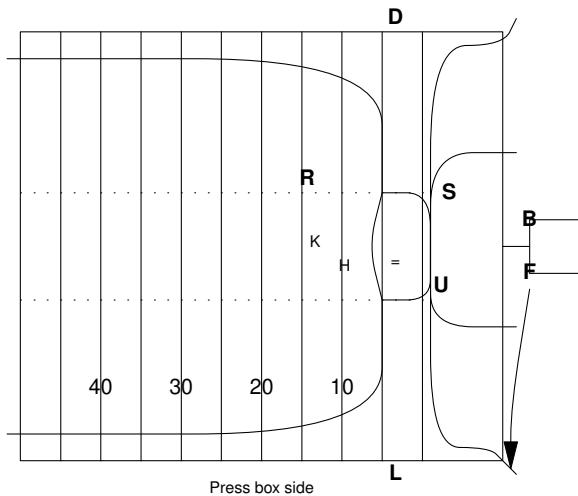


Figure F: Crew of 8

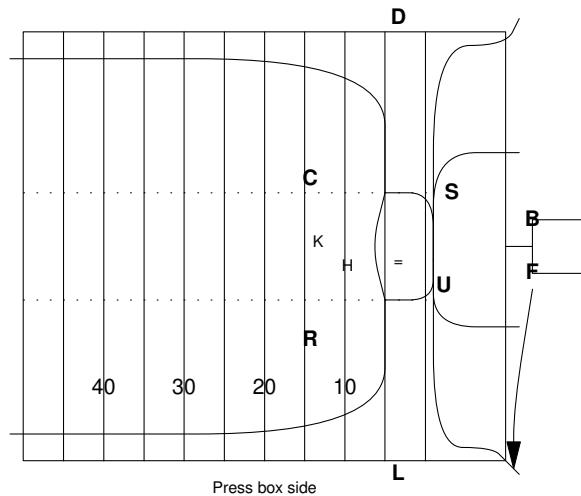
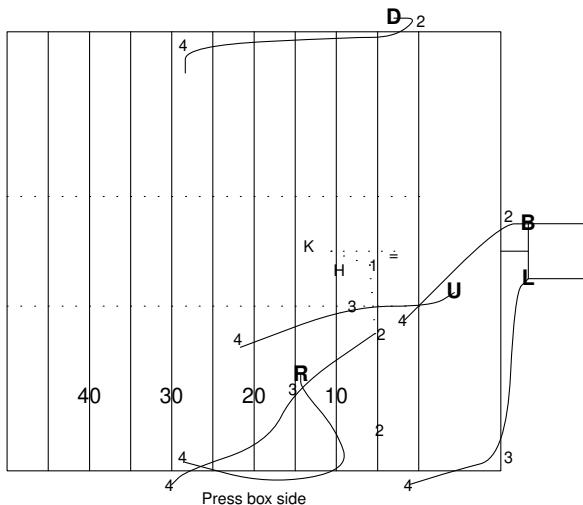


Figure G: Example play (Crew of 5) blocked field goal attempt

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 around the ball. The Umpire stays on the goal line ready to rule if the ball is advanced, and the **Down Judge** 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 Back Judge observes the players still around the original line of scrimmage. The **Down Judge** keeps up with the ball carrier and helps by mirroring the forward progress spot.