

An Offensive Coach's Two Step Process to Utilizing Computer Scouting

by Joe Hollingsworth, Ph.D.

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www.hollysoftware.com

scout@hollysoftware.com

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This article outlines a two-step process to getting offensive coaches into the thick of utilizing computer-scouting software.

Scouting a Defense is Harder than Scouting an Offense

In the May 2000 AFC technology issue, we discussed how over the past decade defensive coaches have used software and computing power to help create sophisticated attacking defenses. Today when a defense attacks, that attack is based on a sophisticated analysis of the opponent's offense. Today's defensive coach prepares his players for what they are going to see on game day and he teaches them what adjustments and calls need to be made out on the field, right before the ball is snapped.

For a defensive coach to get to this level requires a lot of hard work. It is even harder for the offensive coaches. Here's why:

When a defensive coach analyzes a play ran by the offense: He can get a lot of good information about the offense just by focusing on the situation (down & distance, field zone, etc.) type of formation used, the type of play used, the type of blocking used, etc.

When the offensive coach analyzes a defense: He must take into account the opposing offensive formation that the defense lined up against. Since the defense molds itself to the offense, it just does not make sense to look at the defense in isolation. Therefore, the offensive coach not only has to analyze what the defense is doing, he has to analyze the offense too.

The Offensive Coordinator's First Step – “Know Thyself”

Scouting the other team's defense, and developing a play calling strategy based on the defense's tendencies should be the long-term goal. In the short term, an offensive coach should learn his own tendencies. Put yourself in the other man's shoes by performing a self-scout. It will not be easy to do a self-scout. But it will be easier than trying scout the other team's defense. The reasons given for not doing a self-scout: it takes too much time; and I know we have tendencies, but they are not that bad. Convincing yourself that your tendencies are “not that bad” is one of the worst things you can do. Defensive coaches tell us: “before using scouting software, we

thought we knew all their tendencies, so we couldn't believe our eyes when we saw the computer's scouting report”.

How to Self-Scout

For the details on scouting an offense, refer to the article “Transforming Your Defense into a ‘Smart-Weapon, Guided-Missile’ Attacking Defense” in AFC's May 2000 Technology Issue. In short, you need to break down every play by looking at: down, distance, hash, vertical field position, formation used, motion used, blocking used, (for runs) the ball carrier, hole hit, play, (for passes) the receiver, route ran, area of the field where route was ran, the routes ran by other receivers and what the QB did (i.e., drop back, roll out, etc.), and finally the result of the play (gain, loss, incompleteness, etc.). Then analyze all this data by different situations; for example, by Down & Distance, Formation, Field Zone (e.g., in red zone), by Series, etc. It can be done by hand, but using *good* scouting software makes the process a lot easier, and much more effective.

Steps Involved:

- *I don't have time!* – Do the self-scout during the off-season. Get together with the defensive coordinator and break down some or all of your games from the previous season. Put the data into the scouting software and start looking at your tendencies.
- *Why use defensive coordinator?* – Because analyzing offenses is his job. He has been doing it for a long time. Furthermore, you want to hear what he would do to stop your offense.
- *Why do I need to know what my defensive coordinator would do to stop my offense?* – Because once you know your tendencies, and you know what a defensive coordinator would do to stop your offense, you can go back and look at last year's games and see if that's what your opponents did. Be particularly careful to look at games where the other team played you hard. Nine times out of ten, you will see that they were sitting on some of your own tendencies.
- *Benefits!* – Many of the defensive coaches that use our software have remarked: “We sat on their tendencies clear into the 4th quarter before they started to change their play calling.” If you know your tendencies, and you know how they might “sit” on them, and furthermore, you know which teams know your tendencies, then you will be better prepared to change your game plan when required. And, you won't have to wait until the 4th quarter to do so!

The Offensive Coordinator's Second Step – “Know Thy Opponent”

Now it is time to start thinking about scouting the other team's defense. The good news is, after Step 1 you are half way there.

How to Scout Defenses

To scout the other team's defense requires breaking down each play and recording first what the offense did (see “How to Self-Scout” above), and then rewinding the video and breaking down the defense. In short, you want the base defensive front, including the linebackers, and you need

the secondary coverage. You also need to record front adjustments, any line blitzes (stunts) and linebacker and secondary blitzes (and if they showed their blitzes). Finally, you need to record how the defense disguised their coverage.

Steps Involved:

- *I don't have time!* – Like before, do this during the off-season. Break down video from each of your commonly played opponents.
- *What am I looking for?* For beginners, look for at least the following:
 - Blitz tendencies by down and distance, by field zone, and by personnel on the field. We have found that these tend to be fairly constant against a variety of different offenses.
 - Defensive front strengths and weakness according to the different defensive fronts. Look where they give up yards by creating a Hole Hit chart, i.e., for each hole hit by the offense look at average yard/run gained.
 - Identify their standard secondary coverages and determine against which offensive formations they run them. Know how they disguise their coverages.
- *Now what?*
 - During the week, work with your offense to teach them how handle their blitzes. The QB must be able to get you out of a bad play when they show blitz. The linemen must be able to adjust the blocking at the point of attack when a blitz is coming.
 - Modify your play calling to take advantage of their defensive front's weak areas. More than likely you'll want to test their strength, but obviously you don't want to run all your plays at their strength. Run where they are weak!
 - Work with your QB and receivers to prepare them for the secondary coverages they are going to see. Design some pass plays that take advantage of a weak corner, or a seam that they leave unprotected. Make sure your personnel know how they disguise their coverages.

Scouting Software Considerations

- It must include reports based on situation: Down & Distance, Hash Mark, and Field Zones (e.g., in your red zone).
- The reports on the offense must include extensive formation-based reports that analyze the formation's running & passing play, QB action on passes, motion, etc.
- The reports on the defense must include extensive blitz reports (e.g., by Down & Distance, field zone, by defense, and personnel involved). Also, defensive front reports need to show where they give up yards and where they don't give up yards.
- The software 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 3rd & 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.
- 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 defenses 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 your own tendencies and start looking at the defense’s tendencies. The first step is to seriously scout your own offense by utilizing good scouting software. The next step is to start scouting your opponent’s defense and use that to modify your offensive game plan.

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, and at www.hollysoftware.com.