

On behalf of San Jose State University, Head Coach Fitz Hill, and our entire coaching staff, we would like to thank the AFCA for allowing us this great opportunity to share some of our thoughts and ideas on special teams play in this year's summer manual. I would also like to thank all of the coaches with whom I have had the opportunity to work with and learn from over the years in this great sport we coach.

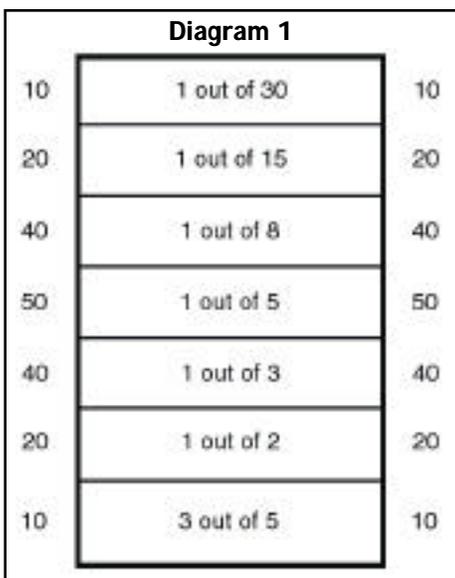
This article will detail our core beliefs on how we try to make a difference in the game through our special teams play. We have four core beliefs that we feel make a huge impact on our special teams play: "Have a Plan," "Have a Style," "Take what the opponent gives you," and most overlooked, "Do what your players do well."

Have a Plan

Our plan is very simple, special teams must be important, organized and structured.

First, we must establish the importance with the coaching staff and players. The kicking game gains importance when you realize how important a role it plays in determining offensive scoring ability. We already know that the further away an offense starts from its intended goal, the more difficult it will be to score. Conversely, the closer the offense starts, the easier it will be to score. Our defensive field chart clearly shows this difference.

The significance of this information is



simply that we can utilize the kicking game to give our opponents poor scoring percentage and enhance our own offense's scoring percentages. For example, on kickoffs, if we can start our opponents inside their own 20-yard line, their

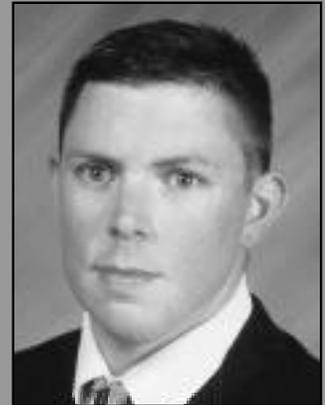
chances of scoring are quite poor. On punts, if we can return to the 40 or beyond, we have greatly increased our offense's scoring ability.

For the past three seasons, we averaged 33 plays of special teams each game, which equates to 20 percent of the game (152 total plays each game). Out of those 33 plays of special teams each game, 25 percent of the game's points are scored and over 35 percent of the game's yardage is gained, hence the phrase "own a third." Also it is good to note that on average two games a season are directly won or lost by a special teams play for every team. With that in mind, your coaching staff must understand that special teams is not a chance for the starters to get a break, you must play the best 11 on every snap of every phase of every game, otherwise you are doing your team a disservice. At San Jose State, I am fortunate that our head coach allows us to play whoever we deem necessary for special teams, so we do have about four to seven starters on each phase of special teams. With that many starters on the special teams, we must do a great job of rewarding and motivating the players involved.

Some of the things we do to reward and motivate the players are: allow the special teams players to eat first during meals; allow special teams players to work a particular specialty instead of conditioning (i.e. we will run and cover six punts on air while the rest of the team runs fifteen 110's.); give awards for "Best Hit," "Specialist of the Week," award helmet decals each week and post all special teams grades in the locker room. The list could go on and on, but it is important that the players are well motivated and rewarded.

Second, we must be organized. Most teams practice on average two hours a day, allotting 15 minutes to special teams (that is 12 percent of practice). With that limited time, we must not waste any time. When the whistle blows we must be set and ready to go. Every minute of special teams must be scripted for the coaches, managers, scout teams and players to ensure that everyone knows what to do and does it as fast as possible. We also script every practice for the kickers, punters and snappers just like we do for offense and defense. This script allows us to know that our specialists are working every day on particular situations and

Spartan Special Teams: "Own a Third of the Game"



Keith Allen

**Special Teams
Coordinator**

**San Jose State
University**

San Jose, Calif.



Diagram 2

	Meetings	Practice
Sunday	Up to 15 minutes – few clips from Saturday	10-15 minutes – on-field corrections
Monday	Off	Off
Tuesday	Seven-minute – punt; Seven-minute – punt block	Five-minute pre-practice A; three minute field goal/field goal block; seven-minute punt; seven-minute punt block
Wednesday	Seven-minute kickoff; Seven-minute kickoff return	Five-minute pre-practice B; three minute field goal/field goal block; five-minute punt; five-minute kickoff; five-minute kickoff return
Thursday	Five minutes each phase (punt/punt block/kickoff/kickoff return)	20-25 minute script; all phases
Friday	18 clips of opponent (three each phase); Depth chart call outs	20 play script ODK; substitution check ODK
Saturday	Game	Game

skills. We must also be organized during our meeting times, we are usually allotted 15 minutes a day (seven minutes for each phase we cover). When we start the meetings, the players are seated in assigned seats by depth with the first team sitting in the first row. In the allotted seven minutes, we then show the clips we need to show, discuss and install what must be discussed and installed. We then have the players sit by depth for the next phase to be discussed. We have them do this as fast as possible to help create a sense of urgency for special teams. We then repeat the procedures. The diagram above shows a normal game week for our special teams.

Third, we must be structured. We believe to be structured, you must have a playbook or some guidelines that you consistently use to develop every phase of the special teams. This assures consistency year in and year out.

Have a Style

Our style is also very simple: Aggressive, Multiple, Simple and Easy. **Aggressive:** Our thought process on every special teams snap is to score or get the ball back. We want to be aggressive and on the attack every play of special teams. We feel that if you are aggressive and attacking, your opponent must be on the defensive. We feel that our opponent, instead of practicing to get better and beat you, they are practicing to defend against you. **Multiple:** We will

usually show the same alignment on all of our special teams but will have different ways to attack and threaten the opponent. **Simple:** We keep the techniques to learn down to three or less at each position. This allows our athletes to rep and master a few techniques instead of learning a different scheme each week. **Easy:** With minimizing the formations, techniques and rules, it allows us to easily adjust within our scheme for each opponent. Our rules are simple, so if our opponent does something unusual, we can easily adjust without wasting a lot of practice time.

Take What the Opponent Gives You

We must study our opponent and know their tendencies, strengths and weaknesses. We must look at match-ups to see if we can create a mismatch within our scheme and personnel against what they do. Our staff looks for specific keys and indicators to teach our players to help predict our opponents move. We may adjust or modify our base scheme a little against our opponent to keep them off guard and guessing. Again, we keep any adjustments simple and easy to implement. The main key is not to beat yourself! Below is a checklist we use when scouting our opponent.

Opponent Punt

- Protection type
- Scheme strength
- Scheme weakness
- Outstanding protection

- Weak protection
- Outstanding cover
- Weak cover
- Hang time
- Block point
- Sky/corner
- Snap/kick time
- Punter steps
- Snap keys
- Punter approach

Opponent Punt Block

- Return type
- Block type
- Any shifting
- Shown reverse
- Returner ability – alignment; acceleration; speed; field ability; courage; vision
- Mass substitute?
- Punt safe?
- How many?
- Tendency to call?
- Any blocks?
- How?

Opponent Kickoff Return

- Return indicators
- Shown reverse
- Returner ability – alignment; acceleration; speed; field ability; courage; vision
- Surprise onsides?

Opponent Kickoff

- Huddle
- Coverage
- Safeties
- Approach
- Hang time
- Touchbacks
- Best cover men
- Contain players
- Kicker
- Direction
- Distance
- Onside kicks

Do What Your Players Do Well

We believe the most important and overlooked part of special teams is to do what you do well. During fall camp, we will install and rep every page of our special teams playbook. We will then evaluate how the players did and how well they picked up each concept. We then modify our base playbook and game plan on what they understood and did well and work it. This becomes our base special teams. We will rep these concepts till our players master them. Then and only then will we expand and add to our playbook and game plan. We find that exposing the players to the entire playbook and forcing them to learn and practice everything at least once during fall camp allows us to install what fits our personnel best. Again, the main key is not to beat yourself!

With these four simple concepts, we believe that special teams can and will “own a third of the game.” Good luck.