

Stance and Starts

The NFL receivers “come off the ball like rockets.” That is a common phrase coaches and NFL players use when describing how NFL receivers come off the line of scrimmage; they want to push the route down field as fast as they can in order to influence the defender and / or the defense. There is a very noticeable difference when an NFL receiver comes off the line of scrimmage compared to a young college player even if they are the same size and have the same speed ability. Younger receivers don’t realize how important that first burst off the line of scrimmage is to the success of the route.

An Olympic sprinter brings his tail up so he is literally falling forward into the start and then jumps out of the starting blocks; there is a point where the 100-meter sprinter has both feet off the ground as he comes out of the blocks!



Before the 1980’s, receivers used a three-point stance (even at the NFL level) but it made it all but impossible to beat the bump and run defender; the DB would simply use both hands and push the receiver to the ground before he could get out of his stance. There was a quick change to the two-point stance that now allows a receiver to get by the press-defender, but the receiver still needs to be low as he comes off the football.

The pictures below show an excellent stance and start used by a receiver facing “off-coverage” meaning the defender is giving the receiver a cushion of several yards. Most of his body weight

is over the front portion of his front foot so he can “fall into the start” rather than having his weight directly under him and then having to redistribute his weight once the ball is snapped so he can move forward. Notice that the yard line that has been enhanced so it’s easier to see that the athlete has very little (if any) body repositioning as he comes off the line of scrimmage. He also uses his arms as a sprinter would starting from a four-point stance in order to help him get the most acceleration using his entire body.

Good Stance – body lean allows the WR to roll off the front foot



Good Start – the body doesn’t drop and he uses his arms to accelerate

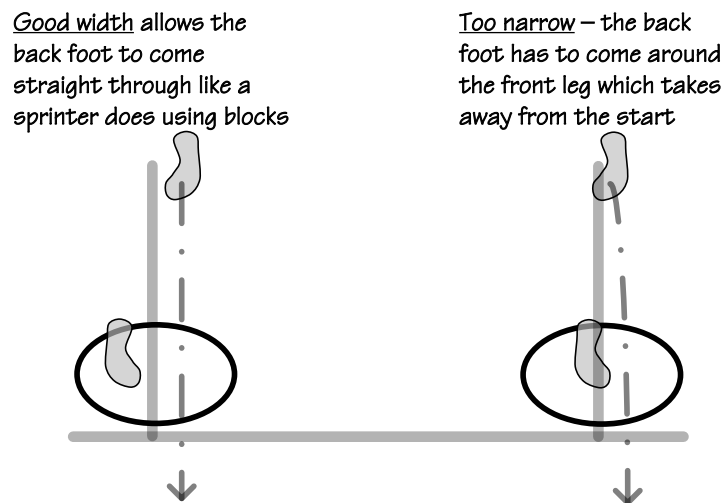


This next picture shows an “empty” set with five receivers and they all have their weight forward and their hands comfortably at their sides as a sprinter would if he were in a two-point stance.



The receiver who has a press defender on him while on the line of scrimmage will stand a little taller in order to distance himself from the DB. This is done so the receiver can “beat him to the punch” meaning he can knock down the defender’s hands before the defender can grab or punch the receiver thus slowing down his release. We will focus on beating the press defender in another article.

Receivers should also focus on a wide base and have as much room as a sprinter does using starting blocks. Inexperienced receivers will sometimes have their feet too close together forcing their back foot to come up and around their front leg rather than having their foot come straight through which helps the start.



A simple trick to find what the receiver’s most efficient stance is to watch him on film. Freeze the point where the athlete starts moving forward after he is dropped his body and or repositioned his feet and that is as close to his natural stance as it can get. As his body adjusts and the muscles get used that stance the receiver will probably make small changes with the goal of being able to run the fastest ten-yard sprint he can from a two-point stance.

Just before snap

Just after snap



This receiver needs to adjust his stance so his body is lower and over the front foot. It takes this receiver .5 seconds after the football is snapped before his feet come off the ground. That's the difference between a 4.5 second forty and a 5.0 second forty just because of the start!

There is a great deal of similarity between the 100-meter sprinter and well-trained wide receiver as they start. Notice the way both athletes use their arms and the angle of their body relative to the ground. The only difference should be where the athletes have their eyes; the sprinter keeps his head down while the receiver has his head up and is looking downfield, most likely at the defender.

The receiver's start is very similar to that of an Olympic sprinter; both these athletes have great body lean and are using their arms to help them accelerate out of their starts. The big difference is that the while the sprinter has his head down, the receiver has his eyes up and focused downfield.



The most important part of any receiver's route is the first six-steps of the route which should be acceleration or speed-steps. Speed-steps are when the athlete is running on the balls of his feet and he is either accelerating or trying to maintain full-speed. The next article in our series will focus on the acceleration zone of the receiver's route.

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