



# Building an All Around Tight End: Five Effective Drills

**By Matt Rahl**

*About the Author:* Matt Rahl is the Tackles/Tight end's coach and Special Teams Coordinator at Winona State University. This is Matt's third year at Winona State, prior to coming to Winona State, Coach Rahl was a Student Assistant at Missouri Southern State University in Joplin, Mo where he also played Tight end and offensive line. The tight ends under the guidance of Coach Rahl have earned three first team all conference selections, one all region selection and a third team all-American selection.

First of all I would like to thank Terry Turek, The Minnesota State High School Football Coaches Association, Winona State University Head Coach Tom Sawyer, and the rest of the Winona State staff for giving me the opportunity to write this article. I would also like to thank all of the young men who have played for me and allowing me to teach them this wonderful game of football. Tight end's at Winona State University refer to themselves as the "Ultimate Warrior" because of the demand put on this position group to do a little of everything. Now if you have ever seen us play and watched our Tight end's you would know that this slogan is definitely a stretch of the truth. However, the demands of a tight end are the same in the run game as that of an offensive lineman, in the pass game they are the same as a wide receiver, and once we have caught the ball we are expected to shed tacklers as if we were a running back. We try to drill each area of concern on a daily basis. It is important to remember to keep your tight end's drill emphasis in relation to your run pass percentage; otherwise you are wasting valuable practice time. At Winona State we are a 50/50 team in terms of run pass. However it is the philosophy of our offensive staff that we must be solid in the run game in order to be effective in the pass game so we try to drill two run blocking drills for every one receiving and/or route running drill in our individual sessions.

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## Daily Drills

We have a group of five drills (Pipe steps, 4 square pipes, quick foot, stick and noose, and releases) in which we perform at the beginning of practice every day. We feel that these drills provide the base for everything we do in terms of technique in both the run and pass game. These drills can also provide for a great opportunity for our players to develop great flexibility and footwork.

### Pipe Steps:

This drill has become an essential drill in my mind for developing great flexibility and strength in our Tight ends core, as well as the base for how

we teach our run blocking progression. We use PVC pipes (they cost about 68 cents per pipe at your local hardware store) to perform the drill. We first want to start by placing our feet in a shoulder width position similar to the relationship we use in our stance and when we squat in the weight room. By doing so we now have established a base in which we can maximize our strength and balance. We want to keep our heels on the ground but have 90 % of our weight placed on the insteps of our feet. This will allow for us to move in any horizontal or lateral movement. Next we will hold the pipes over our head (representing an overhead squat, this also allows for us to keep our head up and eyes forward). We will then progress into



## Minnesota High School Football

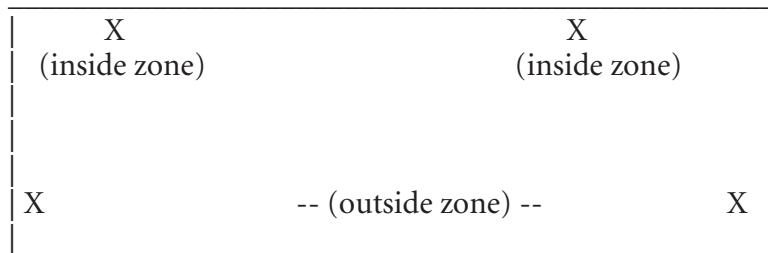
taking ten slow deep squats. Remember to emphasize the slow speed and depth of these squats, these will help with your hip flexibility and in return

will help with your pad level. Once a player has performed his ten squats he will then keep the pipe over his head with his hands as wide as he can make them, and perform “duck walk” for ten yards. During the duck walk it is important that players stay on the insteps of their feet. Tell your players to pound their insteps in the ground (you should be able to hear if they are doing this drill correctly without looking), remember to watch for dragging toes. If a player drags his toes while stepping he is losing power and balance. We want players to keep their head and eyes looking forward while trying to keep their chest as close to their thighs and possible. Once a player has gone pretty steady pace and rotation going.

ten yards, have him stand up, turnaround, squat once and come back performing “duck walks” back. We usually have players repeat this process three times per day.

### 4 square pipes:

Next we have an extension of our pipe steps which also allows us to work our footwork for our inside and outside zone game. We will use six pipes (see diagram) two in the front and two on each side. Players will rotate from position to position with two players performing the first two steps of inside zone located in the front, and two players (one on each side) performing their outside zone steps finishing through five yards on the sides. Players will continue through this drill for two or three minutes. Remember to use this time as a warm-up drill and your players should keep a



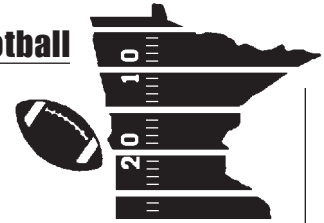
### Quick Feet:

I truly believe that by having quick feet and a good base you can overcome a lot of physical mismatches and mistakes. Former Missouri Southern head football coach, Bill Cooke, used to always tell me ‘physical mistakes will not get you beat consistently but mental mistakes will’. I believe that by having quick feet you allow yourself to get into position to execute blocks or routes. We use the hash marks on the sideline much to the same effect as a quick foot ladder that many programs use in the off season. We also do a variety of drills much like running backs used to do in the old tires or ropes. The first drill we always use is two feet in every hole, then we go one foot in every other hole (it is important to stress that players are using their arms to run from the shoulders and not just at the elbow or wrist), next we go through the ladder lat-

erally putting two feet in every hole and two feet out, we then progress to one foot in and two feet out, to the most mentally challenging two feet in and one foot out drill. We then always finish with a shuffle through the hashes.

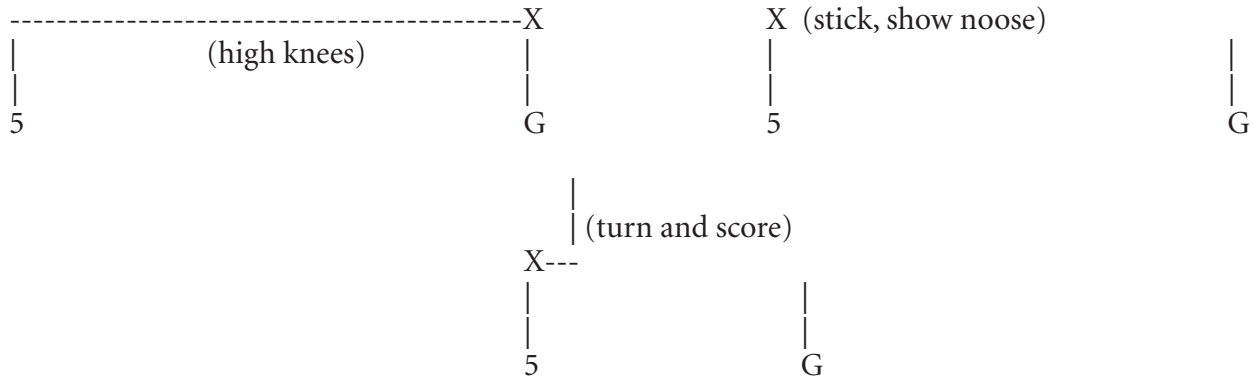
### Stick and Noose:

First things first, a noose is the open area between your thumbs and pointer fingers when you have created a diamond to catch the football. We use S&N everyday as a drill to work on sticking the finish of our routes, getting loose, and catching lots of footballs. We will align on the goal line and perform a nice slow smooth high knee movement to the 5 yard mark, at which point we will stick our foot into the ground as if we were running a drive route. Once we have thrown our foot down we then want to snap our head around toward the



quarterback and show our noose. Once the ball is caught we want to tuck, turn and score. We always stress that we need to tuck the ball away every time we touch it (even if they are just messing around before practice, our tight ends better never let me catch them with the ball untucked). We want to then turn back toward where we came from, or away from the defender, and go score with the

football (see diagram.



**Releases:**

At Winona State we teach our players three releases, rip, swim, and punch. We feel there are three key factors to getting a clean release from the tight end position. The first key point is to take the easiest possible pathway to your route (depending on the defenders alignment), the second is to always keep your feet moving vertical into your route, and the third and most important factor is to make physical contact on the top half of the defensive end's elbow making him turn his body out of position to jam you. With the rip move we are basically ripping our inside arm in an uppercut motion aiming for the back of the Defender's head, with our swim move we are looking for a short fast compact swimming motion aiming to finish on the Defender's lower back pushing him through. Our last release is the punch release in which we

will jab our defending square in the shoulder while we run vertical through him.

I hope this article has given you some insight into how to use a few short easy drills to work with your tight end's on the most important basic aspects of tight end play. Good Luck in your upcoming seasons and if you have any questions please feel free to contact myself or any of our staff at Winona State.