

Running back drills

Youth running back drills

When it comes to being a successful running back, you can't skip over the basics. It's always important to learn the fundamentals, especially in youth flag football leagues where skill level can vary greatly.

Receiving the football

Proper hand placement is key in a football handoff. Here's what yours should look like: Your arms should be close to your body, with your dominant arm across your stomach and the other across your chest. You want to cup your hands to create an oval shape so that when you receive the football, you can secure it tightly against your torso.

When you have the ball, keep it tight and secure it close to your body, decreasing the odds of defensive interference or incomplete handoffs. We recommend first practicing this simple ball-holding setup before running through our various drills. While it may feel simple, it never hurts to revisit fundamentals. You'll thank us later when you go through the season fumble-free!

2-step handoff

Setup: At hike, the running back should be just a few short paces behind the [quarterback](#), either at an angle or directly behind them. As long as they're able to reach the quarterback quickly, this setup can be customized to your [play's](#) needs.

Directions: After hike, the quarterback moves two steps to a pre-designated side, where they meet the moving running back. When their paths cross, the quarterback firmly puts the football in the

running back's cradled arms. The running back then completes their forward route.

Tips: Make sure the running back is also moving when meeting the quarterback for the handoff so that they have momentum to complete their route as quickly as possible. This movement can be done on an angle or straight forward.

3-step handoff

Setup: For this youth running back drill, the running back should be close to the quarterback, either at an angle or straight behind. Make sure all players are behind the line of scrimmage.

Directions: The 3-step handoff is similar to the 2-step handoff, but the difference is—you guessed it—the quarterback runs three steps. Like the 2-step handoff, the two players meet close together, with the quarterback strongly putting the football in the running back's pre-setup arms.

Tips: This handoff can also be completed as a "stretch," where the quarterback positions themselves within arm's length and extends, or stretches, the ball in the running back's arms. Stretch handoffs can be especially effective during fake outs.

1-step fake handoff

Setup: For this running back drill, the quarterback will be moving one step before ball handoff, so the running back should only be a few quick paces away from them, on a slant or directly behind. You can customize this setup—just make sure that all players are behind the line of scrimmage at hike.

Directions: It's time to breakout your acting skills because fake handoffs are only effective if you sell them to the defensive line.

Once the quarterback and running back meet, both players should over exaggerate the handoff, faking as if the running back now has the ball for a forward running play. After this quick “handoff,” the quarterback quickly pulls back the ball and rolls in the opposite direction of the running back. They then release the ball swiftly before the defensive line repositions themselves from the faked handoff.

Tips: The key to this kind of handoff is the salesmanship. When the ball is “handed off,” the running back should slightly lean forward, making it difficult for the defensive line to decipher whether they have the ball. The quarterback should also work on quickly pulling the ball back from the faked handoff, so the defense has a harder time following the play.

Stretch fake handoff

Setup: Like the previous running back drills, the running back should start a few yards away from the quarterback so they can quickly get to the quarterback and perform the fake, which will be done behind the line of scrimmage.

Directions: Upon hike, the quarterback and running back move toward the pre-designated location. Once close to each other, the quarterback extends, or stretches, their arm to mimic firmly tucking the football into the running back’s arms. The running back continues their route as if they just received the ball, aiming to convince the defense to follow them. Once this handoff fake is completed, the quarterback quickly wheels around in the opposite direction of the running back while the defensive line is distracted. But remember, these fakes are only successful in getting the quarterback more time to execute plays if they are tight and fully acted out.

Tips: When performing a fake, communication is key. The quarterback should let the running back and other receivers know ahead of time that they are performing a fake, so there is no confusion during the play.

Running back drills that boost speed and footwork

While it's beneficial for all youth football players to be quick on their feet, it's especially important that running backs are [agile](#) and [fast](#). Because running backs need to be able to dodge, duck, dip, and sprint to the endzone, we prepared some youth football running back drills to help you boost your agility and speed. So double knot your laces, and let's hit the field.

Hop and switch drill

Setup: The intention of the hop and switch drill is to feel more comfortable and confident with tucking the football in your arm, and potentially switching carrying sides, during a game. To get set up for this running back drill, bend over with your feet shoulder width apart, similar to if you were a [center](#) about to hike a football. The football should be tucked against the side of your chest in one arm. The opposite arm should be fully extended, flat on the ground in front of you. Once you are in a balanced position, extend the leg opposite of the arm that is carrying the football.

Directions: Hop a couple yards forward, switching the arm that is carrying the football, then landing on the hand that was originally carrying the football. During this motion, you should also alternate the foot that is planted on the ground and the leg that is extended. Remember, the leg that is extended should always be the opposite of the arm carrying the football. Perform a few more hops in this ball-alternating pattern, back-and-forth, to complete the drill.

Pro-tips: This running back drill is a bit more complicated, so first practice alternating the hand carrying the ball while standing in place. Then kick it up a notch and add the alternating foot. Once you've gotten the hang of transferring the ball while switching your feet, try incorporating the forward hop motion. When you nail down all three pieces together, you'll be able to complete the hop and switch drill no sweat. Well, there may be some sweat, it is a difficult drill after all.

Fast footwork drill

Setup: To set up this running back drill, have two players stand about 15 yards apart. One of the players will be on offense carrying the ball, while the other person will be on defense. Don't have a second player with you at the moment? Use a cone, or other type of marker, to indicate where they would be standing. This still gives you an indication of where to perform the drill.

Directions: To start this drill, run toward the defensive player and perform a technique to get around them. These techniques can range from dips, jukes, spins (keeping your feet on the ground), and slides—whatever footwork and move is needed to get around the defensive guard, while still carrying the football. Quick feet drills are essential, so run through this drill several times, trying a wide variety of footwork techniques, until you feel confident in your maneuvering.

Tips: Want to add another element to the drill to further practice your footwork? Wear your [flags](#) and have the defensive player try to grab them as you're maneuvering. It forces you to be extra quick on your feet as you spin and juke around, making you even more prepared for a game. And, as an added bonus, it helps your

defensive teammate practice their [flag-grabbing skills](#). This drill is an offensive and defensive two-for-one special!

Not only do running backs need to be fast to gain yardage, but they also have to be agile to dodge incoming defenders. Successful running backs have a strong sense of intuition and great vision of the field. By incorporating these running back drills into your practice, you'll develop fundamental skills and quick feet to help you map out your routes and stay—quite literally—two steps ahead of your opponents.