DLight03's Premier Pass Coverage LB Guide

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1. Introduction

Ever-since its release as a public beta in Q1 of 2008, Goal Line Blitz has been an internet phenomena, particularly with fantasy sports junkies. The idea that one could carve and develop their very own version of the perfect football star is a very tantalizing one, but while everyone is flocking at the opportunity to be the next great playmaker, very few players actually realize their goal of football elitism. This isn't due to any lack of effort – surely many, many people just as yourself have spent dozens upon dozens of hours looking through forums and scouting out builds, hopeful to find that one secret ingredient to help turn your player into a league-wide name. But the trick to developing a game-breaking player isn't caught in a snap-shot of his attributes, but rather the knowledge that goes into each skill point distributed.

In this article, you will learn the importance of all 10 of the relevant attributes for a linebacker, particularly those pertaining to *pass coverage*, as well as what special abilities to focus on, which can be ignored entirely and what position best fits your skill set. We'll talk about what you should look for in game replays when evaluating player performance and effectiveness, and even give you a few examples of quality attributes at work so you can build your ideal linebacker. But first, we have to know exactly what it is we're talking about.

2. What is a Pass Coverage Linebacker?

A pass coverage linebacker is a LB that focuses the majority of his attention towards defending the pass, rather than defending the run. These players are generally lacking in strength and tackling compared to their run-stuffing brethren, but excel in picks, deflections and generally shutting down whatever player is being covered in the passing game. These players are a very select and specialized breed of players, designed to make up for a weak secondary, or further support an already strong one. The best pass coverage linebackers are tweaked towards their impressive height, and are really best suited at 6'4" and above (however any size can be utilized).

3. Where Should a Pass Coverage Linebacker Play?

The ideal position for a premier pass coverage linebacker is the LOLB position, or Left Outside Linebacker. The job of the LOLB in Goal Line Blitz is pretty simple – cover the TE, handle outside runs to the right, and stuff the inside. With three primary duties, one might think the LOLB would be best designed as a balanced linebacker – similar to that of the MLB position. In truth, however, the LOLBs objectives rest in a very distinct order. First, he is a stopper of pitches and runs to the offenses right. Second, he is primary defender of the TE in passing situations – two jobs that require strikingly similar skill sets. Stuffing the middle is the final piece of the puzzle for a LOLB, and while he plays a large role in it, he is also more easily supported by a MLB here, so it only makes sense for a LOLB to be developed towards the first two duties.

I mentioned that stopping runs to the outside and playing in pass coverage require very similar skill sets, but can you think of how? Pitches to the outside are their most dangerous when run by high speed, high agility players. These are the bread and butter plays of the elusive back. To stop an elusive back before a play develops on the outside, you need three primary attributes – speed, to get to the outside and catch up to the back, agility to approach a better angle on the back and prevent certain elusive skills from triggering, and jumping. Yes, jumping. Jumping is its most useful against elusive ball carriers – being able to dive at a high agility back on the outside and gaining a few yards on defense can mean the difference between a 2 yard gain, and a 23 yard gain. Now think of how all of these abilities transfer over to the pass coverage side of things – to completely shut down a TE, you need the speed to keep up with him, to hang with solid route running agility is paramount, and to deflect passes you'll need to be able to jump on a level that is competitive with the receiver. All three of these attributes will even benefit you in pulling off of your coverage assignment and assisting in another.

The LOLB position fits beautifully with that of a pass coverage linebacker, because simply by its nature an outside linebacker, and pass coverage linebacker are designed very much the same. This position will allow you to not only help shut down the passing game, but prove you a playmaker on the outside as well. There's nothing quite as satisfying as being the best pass coverage linebacker, and leading tackler on your team at the same time. You can do it all at the LOLB position.

4. What are the 10 Critical Attributes?

1. **Speed**
   For a LOLB, Speed is the do-it-all attribute. It will help better shut down a receiver, gain you critical seconds on outside pitches and make up for any lack of strength and tackling you may have, by allowing you multiple chances to bring an opponent down if need be.

   Example #1: http://goallineblitz.com/game/replay.pl?pbp_id=2945709
   LOLB Justin Durant was able to attack the ball-carrier on an outside pitch in this play before the RG or TE were even able to pull out and block.

Example #2: http://goallineblitz.com/game/replay.pl?pbp_id=2738706
LOLB Justin Durant was able to shoot down the field for a great special teams play here, thanks in part to his speed and poor blocking. His ability to get down the field quickly prevented the returner from the making the luxury decision of which way to turn.

2. **Vision**

   Easily one of the most underappreciated attributes in Goal Line Blitz, Vision benefits the LOLB better than any LB position in the game. It's an absolute necessity to be able to read plays quickly as a LOLB, as a TE on a simple a post route can drag you a good deal away from the line of scrimmage on a handoff. Superior vision will allow you to quickly recognize if a play is in fact a run or a pass, and in passing situations can mean snagging a pick, deflecting a pass or even pulling off of your assignment before a pass is even thrown to support against QBs intended target.

   Example #1: http://goallineblitz.com/game/replay.pl?pbp_id=3390123
   LOLB Justin Durant anticipates a pass to the WR, enabling him to make a play on the ball before it is even thrown. The result? A quality deflection on an assignment not of his own.

   Example #2: http://goallineblitz.com/game/replay.pl?pbp_id=2946205
   LOLB Justin Durant recognized the run play almost immediately, but stayed patient and picked his time to attack. Waiting for the TE and FB to pass him at an odd angle, Durant was able to swoop in and make a great vision-oriented tackle on the HB.

3. **Agility**

   One could argue that agility is just as important as either of the two attributes before it, but its usefulness is tied entirely to the above, which lands it humbly in the #3 spot on this list. Quality agility can allow you to better navigate around blockers, into better tackling positions or even allow you to make outstanding cuts at high speeds. Some believe that agility is also tied to acceleration, as it is essentially your ability to maintain speed during cuts (momentary stops).

   Example: http://goallineblitz.com/game/replay.pl?pbp_id=2945606
   LOLB Justin Durant was able to use his superior agility to acquire a better angle on the HB on this outside pitch – avoiding the RG and TE entirely. His first intention was to take a straight-line approach to the ball carrier, but he saw the RG pulling, and realized he must get around the blocker. A healthy combination of speed, agility and vision made this play possible, but it was agility that allowed the quick adjustment upon visual recognition, and cat-like cuts once at the proper angle for the tackle.

4. **Tackling**

   Tackling, just like strength, does not need to be insanely high for a LOLB. The majority of your tackles tend to be against quicker, more agile players and receivers, and as such you're not looking at as much tackle-breaking ability as you are tackle-avoiding ability. Keeping this value

closely in line with your strength is a good idea at LOLB, and as a pass coverage linebacker.

5. **Jumping**

As discussed briefly, Jumping can help a LB in a variety of ways – be it tripping up an elusive half back, gaining an extra few yards on the opponent, or simply in pass deflections. The jumping attribute is easily one of the most underrated, neglected necessities in the game. When I say "gaining an extra few yards on the opponent," and making "dive tackles," I'm not just being redundant either. I have a strong belief that while the two are connected, they are both two very different skills triggered by jumping (as initially evidenced by the description of Jumping itself). Gaining a few yards on the opponent does not necessarily mean diving at them, but perhaps the distance moved upon initial recognition of the play (as is to lunge forward), or it may simply mean the distance at which you can make dive tackles, along with its effectiveness, improves with the attribute.

Example #1: http://goallineblitz.com/game/replay.pl?pbp_id=3606956
LOLB Justin Durant was not able to anticipate this pass, but because of his quality jumping he was able to make an outstanding deflection on another player's assignment, despite being several steps away at the time the pass was caught.

Example #2: http://goallineblitz.com/game/replay.pl?pbp_id=3608233
LOLB Justin Durant was caught over pursuing the HB on a pitch to the outside (or perhaps an elusive back skill triggered his mistake), but because he invested in jumping, he was able to make a last-ditch dive-tackle to turn a potential big play into a 0.5 yard loss.

6. **Strength**

Strength can mean a lot to a sure-tackling linebacker, but for a LOLB its usefulness comes from the improved ability to shed blockers and get to the HB. WRs generally do not pose much of a threat in strength, so defeating their blocks is a simple matter of having more than them – which means you don't need an obsessive amount. This is because your strength is utilized more to defeat blocks than it is to tackle ball carriers, as most HBs in outside pitches are higher speed and agility based (and thus lower strength themselves).

Example: http://goallineblitz.com/game/replay.pl?pbp_id=3390078
LOLB Justin Durant may be lacking in strength, but he still has invested enough for a legitimate purpose – to help defeat blocks from WRs, TEs or other offensive annoyances. In this play, Durant is picked up early by a great block by a WR, but because of his strength, among other things, he was able to eventually disengage the WR and make a play on the ball carrier. Higher strength would help with this further, and will also benefit in forcing fumbles. Usually however, there are more high speed, low strength WRs than otherwise, so your strength is really relative – 20 strength against 10 strength WRs is great, even though 20 strength is not a lot in the grand scheme of things. Power Backs are really a kryptonite to a pass coverage LOLB, but such players

are generally inside-runners that fall more into the responsibility of MLB than LOLB.

7. **Blocking**
Blocking is another neglected attribute that many LBs should pay at least a little attention to. While it is not necessarily better than Strength, Agility or Vision for avoiding or shedding blocks, it is certainly an attribute that helps, and as such should be trained up appropriately over time. Aside from an improved ability to remove yourself from a defender, blocking will also benefit you on special teams, where you may need to block for a return man.

Example: http://goallineblitz.com/game/replay.pl?pbp_id=3391096
LOLB Justin Durant was caught early in this play by the TE, but was able to defeat him in time to make a quality play on the RB. He did this with a combination of vision, agility, strength and blocking. Allowing yourself an extra modifier to decide whether or not you can break a block is a great thing. While having an enormous blocking amount is not as good as, say, an enormous strength amount, it is a great thing to train when nothing else can be efficiently improved upon daily.

8. **Catching**
All the jumping in the world won't snag you any picks if you can't hang on to the ball. Catching will increase your odds of catching a pass, whether it's intended for you or not.

Example: http://goallineblitz.com/game/replay.pl?pbp_id=3389238
LOLB Justin Durant may not have the best hands in the world, but his simple investment in catching, as well as jumping, allowed him better odds of coming down with this pass.

9. **Confidence**
Confidence is a difficult thing to convey in replay. Essentially, it is your ability to play at your level despite adversity (such as a missed tackle), and prevents a snow-ball effect of poor performance. Conversely, it will also allow you to perform slightly better in clutch situations – such as crucial 3rd or 4th down plays, or in the final few minutes. This is another helpful ability you can invest in over time through simple training. Keep in mind that Confidence also plays a larger role in the playoffs, so if you are on a contending franchise, you may be well-served to give confidence some extra attention heading into the final few games of the season.
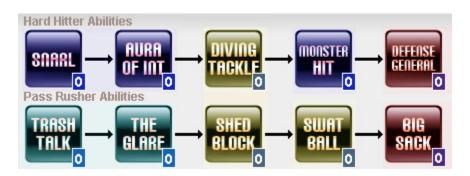
10. **Stamina**
Don't let Stamina's low ranking mislead you. Stamina is by far the single most important attribute in the game – if you have poor stamina, you will hardly touch the field at all. It is merely rated #10 out of 10 from a pure mechanical beneficiary standpoint. It's more of a necessity than anything else. It's important to note, however, that maintaining a stamina level that allows you to play on hard, is much more beneficial than spending points in other areas most of the time. This is because playing on hard means a 20% bonus to attributes. If you level up, and are 5 stamina points away from being able to effectively play games on hard, then you

would often be better served to place all of those points into stamina, unless you strongly believe you can distribute those 5 points somewhere else, and achieve a better improvement than a 20% bonus to all attributes – which is not very likely. The higher level attributes you acquire, the more beneficial it is to maintain a stamina level that allows one to routinely play on Hard intensity.

5. **Which Special Abilities Do I Need?**

As a pass coverage LB, special abilities are not quite as important to you as attribute points, however there are a few helpful skills you do not want to pass up on, and a few you want to stay away from completely, so I've made a basic color-key for you to follow.

Abilities in **Purple** represent skills that help correct native deficiencies of a pass coverage LB. These include *Snarl* and *Aura of Int* -- both of which help reduce the Morale of opponents and make tackling easier -- and *Monster Hit*, which helps to force fumbles – something that is hard to come by as a low-strength LB. Pumping points into these skills is not generally recommended, but can help hide your weaknesses in run support.

Abilities represented in **Red** are the do-not-touch abilities. These abilities require premium points to improve, and simply does not benefit pass coverage, or the LOLB position enough to make them worthwhile. Rarely does a LOLB attack the Quarterback, which makes *Big Sack* much more of a luxury skill than anything and *Defense General* applies only to the MLB position – a position that is not best suited for a pass coverage linebacker. If you choose to make a pass coverage MLB, as opposed to LOLB, then you can consider Defense General, but otherwise it is a waste of valuable skill points.

Abilities found in **Green** are the tier-2 abilities of a pass coverage linebacker – abilities that you may want to strongly consider, as they synergize very well with your build. These abilities include *Trash Talk* and *The Glare*, both of which directly affect the Morale of the QB, and thus your ability to defend the pass. In general, there are two philosophies behind a linebacker – those that are physical marvels, and those that are walking Auras, and while both of their merits, one would be well-served to achieve a proper balance of physical attributes, and morale-reducing abilities.

Lastly, the abilities highlighted in **Gold** showcase the best of the best abilities for a LOLB – and sub sequentially, a pass coverage LB. Dropping points into *Diving Tackle* is critical to make use of your

unique jumping ability and tripping up HBs on outside pitches, *Shed Block* works in great synergy with your blocking, strength, speed and agility to get to get past blockers, and *Swat Ball* is the ability of all abilities for pass defense, not to mention it works wonderfully with your jumping and catching abilities.

6. **Quality of Plays, Not Quantity**

Some of the attribute rankings in this guide, as well as the build of Justin Durant may be in direct contrast with advice you've taken from notable or productive players, but keep in mind this game is still growing, and everyone is still learning and experimenting. It's also important to distinguish the difference between quantity of plays, and quality of plays. It's not uncommon to find a player who swears by the idea that Speed and Agility are everything, and vision is only adequate up to a certain point (often times only a little over a third of these player's speed and agility). While it's true that speed and agility alone can net you many tackles, tackles themselves are not always indicative of a quality player.
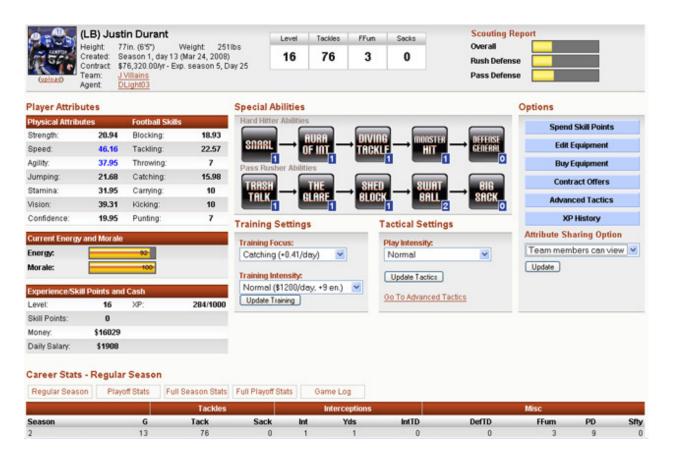
To give you an idea of what I mean, understand this: A player with superior speed and agility may be able to beat others to a tackle more often than not, but with poor vision, he may not recognize the play entirely until the damage is already done. Strive for quality, not quantity. The same is true for LBs that swear Agility and Vision are the only things that matter – yes, that is a very formidable combination, but if you cannot reach the HB before he gains positive yards, or if you cannot hang with the TE or help out in near-by pass coverage, what good is it really? This is why Quality is highly appreciated in Justin Durant's build – Speed is a Quantity skill, but it is followed by Vision, Agility and shortly-there-after Jumping, all of which are more quality-oriented attributes. A player that has 15 tackles on a HB in a game, but allows him to acquire on average 4 yards per tackle, is not doing an outstanding job at his position. A LOLB, however, that allows, on average roughly 2 yards per tackle on the HB is doing a superb job stopping the run. The same is true in pass coverage – you don't want a bunch of tackles on the TE, you want a bunch of pass deflections and no-throws. Stats do not tell the whole story for a linebacker, but a quality linebacker is more than capable of achieving solid statistics on top of solid plays.

7. **Evaluating Your Performance**

Too many people look at their attributes and try to improve each skill to a point that it "looks good." While a first-glance assessment can be helpful, it should not be your primary means to distributing skill points. The best thing you can do is watch each play you are involved in – not just plays in which you make a tackle, or have a deflection, but plays in which you are on the field at all. Try and figure out what your main problem is on many of these plays – are you recognizing the play too slowly? Are you over pursuing the TE or HB too often when trying to make a tackle? Is the TE catching passes over your head, despite the fact that you're right on him? Seeking out the real-time weaknesses of your linebacker is a great way to see the best way to improve.

8. **Sneak Peek at Lvl.16 LOLB Justin Durant**

Now that you know all that I know about being a pass coverage LOLB, take a look at Justin Durant at Lvl.16 to see how it all pans out. Keep in mind that this is not the most efficient build possible, as I've made mistakes myself in route to developing a very solid player.

Justin Durant spent much of the season at MLB before moving back to his native position at LOLB, at which point he acquired all of his PDs, most of his tackles and an INT. He is on pace for nearly 93 tackles, but I expect him to hit 100 by the end of the season. There are areas in which I want to improve in, that I will address shortly: I would like to put another point into Diving Tackle, Shed Block and Monster Hit. I may also invest a lot of points over the next few levels in Trash Talk and The Glare, but I didn't start off Durant as a walking-aura, so I'm not so sure I intend to finish him that way. I would like to get my agility higher, as well as my Vision (at least 45). My speed will also need to be improved to 48.3 base (more information on this in the future) to maximize my point gain per level. I'm currently training Catching, and after I'm comfortable with it, I'll be moving my training to jumping, or tackling. I would like to keep my jumping and tackling at a fairly equal number. I am not playing on Hard, because I play special teams, as well as backup ROLB and MLB, as to ensure I get as many touches as possible when LOLB is not on the field. I believe being on the field more is more beneficial for my team at the moment than a 20% attribute boost across the board.

As you can see, I do not have a strong focus on strength and tackling. I do not believe these should be your core attributes as a LOLB, merely secondary skills that can, and should be improved when needed

(scaling properly with the competition). Tackling, Strength and Blocking have all been trained up to their current point, and have cost me little to no skill points.

9. **What Are You Waiting For?**

And there you have it! Just about everything I know about being a stellar pass coverage linebacker, you now know too! The only difference is, what took me 16 levels of trial and error, you now know from the start! Figure out where Durant could improve, and model your own LB after that improvement.