On behalf of the Head Coach Terry Shea and the entire Rutgers University football staff, it is my pleasure to present an article for the AFCA Summer Manual.

At Rutgers, we believe very strongly that the kicking game can win at least two football games a season and provide a very solid chance for success in every game.

The kicking game is something that takes commitment. Just wanting good things to happen in special team play will not get it done! You must truly give your kicking units a chance for success and this will only happen if you allot the proper meeting and practice time for each individual kicking phase.

**Philosophy**

An effective kicking unit is built with personnel, morale, organization, fundamentals, toughness, and preparation. The players selected to play special teams at Rutgers are chosen on the following criteria:

**Care About Winning:** We will and you should always have a superior effort when everyone’s primary goal is winning.

**Know Your Assignment:** All kicking plays involve specific assignments. You cannot help your team, no matter what your ability, if you do not understand your assignment.

**Love for Contact:** You must be a great contact player. Toughness is an essential characteristic to be a special teams player.

**Speed:** Speed is essential. The ability to run in order to make blocks or tackles is what it’s all about.

**Hustle:** Simply play a little harder than you think you can on every special team play.

**Shield Punt**

A vast majority of all football teams today use some form of the spread punt formation with two wide gunners or cover men. Below is something different to think about, the shield punt.

**Philosophy**

The shield punt is a formation that gives you the ability to get as many as seven immediate cover players, plus it gives your opponents something very different to prepare for in only one week of time.

1. Do you rush the punt? How?
2. Do you work a return? How do you hold up?

**Personnel**

The front line players are the fastest six players on your football team who you have faith in as open-field tacklers. You get a bonus player if you can find a defensive back, runningback, or wide receiver who can also deep snap — as your center has no blocking responsibility.

The shield personnel are made up with big bodies. At Rutgers, we use linemen who can run. After their blocking responsibility, they serve as our support players in coverage.

**Mechanics**

A. Always huddle on the sideline for any special instructions and for the call.
B. We do not huddle on the field. Hustle onto the field and get lined up.
C. Take proper split, stance, and alignment.
D. See the ball out of the corner of your eye and move on the snap.

**Procedure at the Line of Scrimmage**

Shield one is your quarterback (he will make all your calls). Your terminology can be anything you are comfortable with, but the following must be communicated.

A. Check to see that you have 11 men on the field and also check the front and make sure your team is ready for play.
B. Protection call.
C. Set your team one final time. There can be no movement after this final call, the center will pause at least one second after this command and then snap the ball.

**Diagram 1: Splits & Alignment**

**Splits and Alignments**

**L1/R1:** Starting point one yard split from center (can cheat it out as you feel more comfortable). Your toes are parallel on center’s heels.

**L2/R2:** Two yard split from one’s. Your toes are parallel on one’s toes.

**L3/R3:** Two yard split from two’s. Your toes are parallel with two’s toes.

**S1:** Toes at eight yards from the ball. Align your right foot on center’s left foot.

**S2:** Toes at eight yards from the ball. Split one yard from S1. (This will allow a path for the snap of the ball.)
S3: Toes at eight yards from ball. Split six inches from S2.

Punter: Heels at 15 yards.

Release and Blocking Technique

Front Line

A: Your release technique is to take a lead step laterally, then cross over into your release lane. The further the man in your lane is from you, the flatter your release must be to make sure he doesn’t penetrate the line of scrimmage without you making contact with him.

B: Your blocking technique is to run through rushers. To achieve this type of blocking, it is important to keep your head up, maintain a good running base (slightly narrower than shoulder width) and keeping your hands inside on the opponent’s numbers. It is important to run through rushers, not to brush them with your hands or the edge of your shoulder. Keep your feet moving throughout the collision, which will stop the rushers’ initial charge, and then release.

C: If no one penetrates your release lane, avoid defenders trying to slow your coverage. If you are L1/R1, you must take your first step into your release lane, and if you are being driven outside, you can come under the defender to get into the alley.

Release Lanes

L1/R1: Your release lane is from your outside shoulder to head-up on L2/R2
L2/R2: Your release lane is from your outside shoulder to head-up on L3/R3
L3/R3: Your release lane is from head-up to anyone outside.

Shield

As the ball is snapped, the shield must step up and in to close the distance between S1 and S2. After stepping a half yard up and in, the shield will then set themselves in a solid football position, with knees bent, butt down, head up and arms out. Because this is a zone protection scheme, the shield personnel may have to block more than one rusher in their area. It is important that the shield think “Big,” punch with hands inside, and above all, do not drop your helmets at collision!

Coaching Point: If three’s are having difficulty releasing off the of line of scrimmage — make switch call which exchanges responsibilities between three’s and two’s.

Center

A. The No. 1 responsibility is to make a crisp, accurate snap. It is better low and around the right thigh of a right footed punter. The snap should reach the punter’s hand in .8 seconds. Notice the shield personnel will align in a position to give you a proper snapping lane to the punter. Use this lane as your guide.

B. After “set” call by S1, you may snap the ball anytime. Always sprint to a head-up position on the ball. You are a ball man.

Punter

A. The alignment should be with your heels at 15 yards from the ball.

B. Give the snapper a high hip target with both hands.

C. Punt with a quick, smooth rhythm.

D. After punt, give a directional call (Left, Middle, Right, Short)

E. After punt, release and cover, you are the safety. Pin the ballcarrier to the sideline and try and slow the returner until help arrives. Buy time.

Coverage

The beauty of this punt formation is that you can get up to seven immediate cover people. This formation allows you three ball men, two alley players and two contain players.

Coaching Breakdown

The ideal situation would be to have four coaches work with this unit (You can get away with three, if that is all the manpower you can afford).

The front line should have two coaches assigned to it — one to work with L1, L2 and L3 and one to work with R1, R2 and R3. (If you need to, one coach can work with the entire front, but this would not be the ideal situation since they are too spread out.) One coach can handle the Shield personnel - S1, S2 and S3, and one coach can work with the center and the punter.

We do a lot of half line work. This way you can get two shields to work — and I feel the shield is what takes the most time to develop.