

TACKLING

RESOURCE www.coachingrugby.com

Compiled / edited by Jo Jo Gunn

Philadelphia – Whitemarsh RFC clinic coach

Winning teams spend at least 50% of their time practicing defensive techniques and systems to prevent the opposition from scoring. This is because rugby is often at least 50% defense and good tackling helps to win games. If all members of your team can improve their tackling techniques, they will be able to increase the amount of pressure they can put on the opposition and force them to make mistakes. Which will create more "turn over" opportunities for your team to regain control of the ball and therefore control of the game.

If your players never miss a tackle, the opposition will find it very difficult to score against you. You will severely test their ability to create space in 2v1 situations. First time tackles are key! This will prevent your opponents from going forward toward your goal line and force them back towards their own goal line. Well-timed tackles can stop opponents from passing the ball, making defense easier for the rest of your team. Pressure tackling can force the opposition to knock-on, or make a forward pass, giving your team the advantage of the put-in at the subsequent scrum and controlled possession from which to launch your next attack. Your team can also gain advantage by immediately regaining possession of the ball from your opponents' mistake, in which case the referee will often allow your team to play on (Laws of the Game No.8 - Advantage) and make progress by attacking what is usually a disorganized defense. You should coach defense as attack without the ball.

The best way to develop tackling skills is to practice against a partner in a kneeling position and then gradually progress to walking, jogging and finally full-paced full contact with Body Suits and shields and then full tackling. Another consideration is to introduce tackling on soft ground or spongy gym mats and/or encourage the players to take off their trainers or boots. Make sure that players practice with someone about the same size and weight and that the players are thoroughly warmed up before starting a tackling practice. Use some noncompetitive strengthening exercises, like piggy-back walks, bear hug lifts and walks over 5m to 10m distance, to prepare for your contact practices. Do not encourage your players to trip opponents or to tackle around the neck or above shoulder height because it is very dangerous.

As part of tackling practice, it is also important for you to coach your players to practice making contact with the ground safely when they fall. Be aware of safe falling practices as you develop tackling skills, especially at speed. When being tackled, the tackled player needs to take contact on his terms and in strong body position. This will help them go with the flow of the impact because this will help them land and roll naturally. Players should be coached to round their shoulders as they prepare to hit the ground and land mainly on their back and side. Tuck their chins into the chest as they land and bend their knees, keeping them tucked up, and resist the urge to put their straight arms or hand out to break their fall as they may injure themselves. You should always coach players at all levels to get back on their feet IMMEDIATELY to rejoin the game or actively roll away from the ball to prevent giving away a penalty (Laws of the Game No.15 - The Tackle).

Rugby Union Laws state that when the ball carrier is tackled, he or she must pass or release the ball immediately, move away from the ball and get up on his or her feet before playing the ball again. If the ball carrier falls down without being held, he or she can get up and continue running forward (Laws of the Game No.14 -Ball on the Ground). When the ball carrier is tackled, the tackler must grip the opponent tightly as they both land on the ground to ensure that the player has to release the ball. Once your players become skilled tackler and seasoned rugby players, they will find that executing a good tackle or a "big hit" can be as satisfying and important as scoring a try.

If every player in your team works hard to develop their tackling techniques, you will be a difficult side to beat. Before you start any contact practice it is important to warm up thoroughly. You can introduce some non-competitive strengthening exercises with a partner about the same size. **Always control tackling sessions carefully and keep safety and discipline a high priority.**

TYPES OF TACKLE

SIDE TACKLE:

1. Start your practice of the side tackle from a kneeling position.
2. As the ball carrier approaches, prepare for the tackle by keeping the tacklers head up, chin off their chest and back flat.
3. With the shoulders braced for impact, concentrate on place the head BEHIND the ball carrier's legs (see figure 4.1a).
4. The best contact is made in the dip between neck and shoulders.
5. Wrap their hands around the ball carrier's legs, and drive up and through with the legs.
6. You must coach the tackler to keep their eyes open and hold on tightly. Try to fall on top of the attacker (see figure 4.2b).

**FIGURE 4.1A
PREPARATION**



- Watch the ball carrier.
- Keep head up; chin off chest, back flat.
- Look forward.
- Head BEHIND the ball carrier's legs.

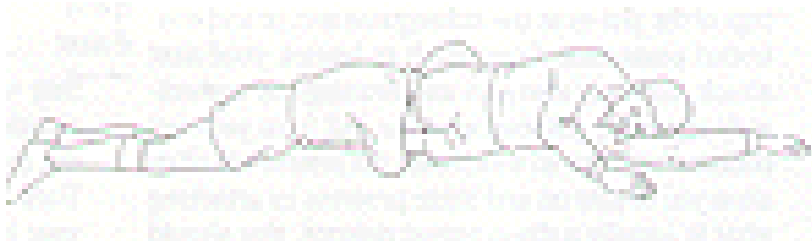
FIGURE 4.2B

EXECUTION



- Shoulder braced, contact on thigh.
- Wrap arms around thighs, pull and hold tight.
- Keep eye open.
- Drive up and through ball carrier with legs.

**FIGURE 4.2C
FOLLOW-THROUGH**



- Hold tight.
- Turn ball carrier sideways.
- Try to land on top ball carrier.

FRONT TACKLE:

1. In the front tackle, (not the "big hit"), tacklers use the opponent's forward momentum to their advantage to bring the ball carrier down.
2. At an early stage in a player's development you need to coach this technique.
3. It is only when a player reaches physical maturity and are more experienced that you can introduce tackles (The Hit) that drive the attacker backwards.
4. Start the development of the front tackle from a kneeling position or squat position, then progress to a crouching or standing start.
5. As the ball carrier approaches, the tackler looks up and targets the opponents legs and ribs and they need to move their head to one side of the ball carrier's body (see figure 4.2a).
6. Players should be encouraged to practice and become proficient on both shoulders.
7. The tackler then drives his shoulder into the attacker's ribcage as they wrap their arms around his or her thighs.
8. Using the ball carrier's momentum, sit and fall backward as they turn (see figure 4.2b).
9. This allows the tackler to bring the attacker over their shoulder and fall on top (see figure 4.2c).
10. A key factor is this allows the tackler to regain his feet quickly and rejoin the game before the attacker.

FIGURE 4.2A PREPARATION



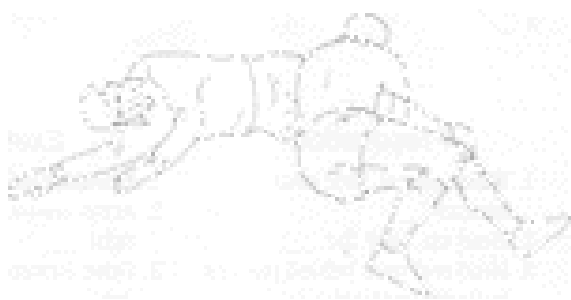
- Watch the ball carrier
- Look up into thighs and ribs
- Keep back flat
- Move head and neck to one side of the ball carrier's body

FIGURE 4.2B EXECUTION



- Strong shoulders on contact
- Drive shoulder up into lower ribs
- Wrap arms around ball carriers thighs
- Follow ball carrier's momentum: Sit, fall backward and turn

FIGURE 4.2C FOLLOW-THROUGH

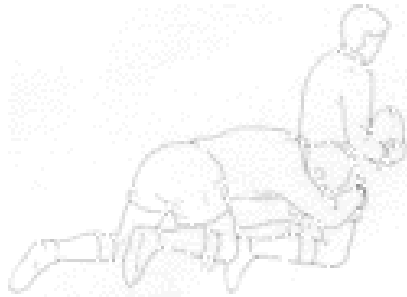


- Allow player to fall over the shoulder
- Turn ball carrier sideways and land on top

REAR TACKLE:

1. Sometimes players need to turn and run up to and catch and tackle an opponent from behind to stop them from scoring or gaining ground.
2. To do this at pace, players need to time their tackle carefully to be sure that they make solid contact.
3. Remember to ensure your players are wearing training shoes or bare feet when you introduce this type of tackle.
4. To execute the rear tackle, the tackler needs to place their head behind or to the side of the ball carrier's buttocks as they grip tightly around the opponents thighs and drive forward with their shoulder (see figure 4.3a).
5. The tackler then needs to pull the ball carrier's legs inward and try to fall on top of the attacker.
6. Sometimes, especially near your own line, a smother tackle is useful, in which the tackler wraps their arms around the ball carrier and the ball, preventing a pass to a supporting player.

**FIGURE 4.3A
PREPARATION**



- Watch player, time the contact
- Head up, back flat
- Head and neck behind player's buttocks or to side

**FIGURE 4.3B
EXECUTION**



- Shoulders into buttocks
- Arms around thighs, squeeze tight
- Drive forward with shoulders

**FIGURE 4.3C
FOLLOW-THROUGH**



- Pull ball carriers legs to side
- Land on top