

This TACKLE paper is available on the “RugbyRugby.com” website which has several excellent coaching sessions a really worth a visit.

Martin Gallagher - Director of Rugby – Rugby Canada

Monday, March 07, 2005

The Tackle

The ideal tackle is one that gives the ball carrier restricted options. The tackler must dominate the tackle. As the coach we should be ‘teaching’ the tackled player to try to dominate the tackle!

How does the defender dominate a tackle? He tries to force the carrier to go the way he/she, the tackler, wants him/her to go to make his/her tackle more effective. He/she will, for example, try to get on the inside of his man, forcing him to run in an arc in order to beat him while he/she, of course, runs in a straight line and thus has a shorter distance to cover than the ball-carrier. The opposite can be true, too. Some sides may well employ “in-defense” whereby you run from outside your man forcing him inside to heavier traffic but in both cases the tackler ends up making a side-on tackle, an easier tackle than a head-on.

I find this an enormous subject as obviously the situation and your defense systems will decide upon what sort of tackle you make. Sometimes you will have to make a head-on tackle, especially close to your line. Your side may be using a drift defense, which will probably mean you will employ the side on tackle. A rush defense depends much upon getting to your man as he gets the ball and is more head-on; you may not have the space to get low into the tackle and have to smother tackle instead, even using the ball carrier's momentum to his own detriment... and so on. Therefore, I am going to keep it simple by trying to describe the basics of the simple tackle more for those who are coaching youngsters than for the coaches of sophisticated sides.

First of all, let us talk about the basic components of the tackle.

Where should you hit your opponent to make it easier to knock him down? We used to say below the knees and in many cases this is still the best (I have seen Paulse of South Africa and Stuart Abbott before he left South Africa for England, tackling Jonah Lomu in this way, most effectively) but many will argue that a low tackle allows the tackled player to get his pass in. So some say tackle the ball. It is best perhaps to hit him below his point of balance just below buttock level or at buttock level.

How should you hit him? With the shoulder; it is important is that you hit your opponent hard with the shoulder. In order to do this, you must lower your body in the run up, crouching, and drive off either one or both your feet, launching yourself at your target in a dive. Often, though, a head-on tackle is made from an almost stationary position, then the shoulder is lowered, and you hit the opponent hard with your shoulder, pumping your legs, driving the ball-carrier backwards.

You must by law use your arms in a tackle but that is not the only reason to do so. It makes the tackle more effective. You drive or dive off one or two feet hitting the opponent with your shoulder and at the same wrap your arms around him, pulling him towards you with the arms. This is particularly effective if you are tackling the legs from the side or from behind. If you are making a head-on tackle, you will hardly have to pull your opponent towards you! Nevertheless, you will have to put your arms around him and lock hands so that he cannot burst through your tackle.

For your own safety learns to put your head to the side- from a side-on position it should be behind your man, in a head-on tackle, to the side.

Coaches of junior players should get them to practice this basic tackle against tackle bags, concentrating on getting the head in the right position, stressing that if technique is good then the safety of the tackler.-and the tackled- are assured. Confidence and courage are important and courage can be developed through confidence and that is developed through familiarity brought about by practice.

Next put several players, standing scattered around a square of 10 or more meters. Three or so tacklers on their knees must move around the square tackling as many players as they can in 1 minute. As a man is tackled he rises to his feet again but the same tackler may not immediately tackle him again but must move to another standing

player. Each tackler must count his number of tackles. He must put his shoulder below the knees of the stander, from front back or side, wrap his arms around the legs and pull in with his arms until his opponent collapses. He may not rise to his feet in the tackle. This is fun and is excellent for teaching the basic techniques.

Next you put several tacklers, on their knees, in a hollow square. The others line up on the open side of the square, in single file, and they run at half pace around the outside of the square. As they pass each kneeling tackler, they are tackled, go down, rise to their feet and continue around the square, taking a tackle every few meters. There must be space between runners to give time for each man to rise to his feet after the tackle. If you are lucky and have enough rugby balls, give every runner a rugby ball so that when he is tackled he learns to place it properly, rise to his feet, pick up the ball and continue his run- thus bringing in more skills of another sort.

Finally on one corner of a square put several runners in single file. On the opposite corner, facing them put several tacklers. The runner has a ball. He must run diagonally across the square to try to score a try on the opposite line. The tackler comes from his opposite corner to try to tackle the runner from the side, putting him down before he scores. Start at half-pace and then build up the speed- always head in the right place, concentrating on hitting in with the shoulder, pulling in the arms. Build up confidence.

When this is mastered, let the runners try to dominate the tackle by employing swerves and side steps while the defender tries to dominate it by keeping the tackler on his outside.

There are many other more sophisticated tackling drills but these I have outlined here are good for young players fairly new to the game- in fact they are also good for even older, more sophisticated players. It never hurts to be reminded of basics.

Please feel free to visit the Coaches section at “RugbyRugby.Com”