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Coach's Corner

# Teaching Football Players Fundamental Tackle Techniques

By Reece Shields and Jiling Liu 



**T**ackle football has the highest number of injuries in contact sports (Gilbert & Johnson, 2011). Certain injuries in the head and neck may severely impact the player's physical, neurological and physiological functionality, even sudden death, as well as the quality of their personal life in the long run (Kucera et al., 2017). These injuries commonly occur during a collision when a defender is attempting to tackle an opponent, particularly with the defender's head being down and neck being curved (Stockwell et al., 2020). To reduce and prevent these injuries from early on, we will break down the essential techniques for two types of tackles and recommend the proper training procedure to coaches.

## Essential Tackle Techniques

Frequent head and neck injuries are directly associated with the two most commonly used tackle techniques on the field—direct contact tackles and angle tackles (Molinari & Molinari, 2010). To perform both tackles effectively and safely, a general rule of thumb is to keep a player's head up and out of the tackle, use the legs for power, keep the chest up, and use shoulder pads to make a tackle.

Direct contact tackles occur when opposing players are running straight at each other. It is almost impossible to not involve the head and helmet area during a direct contact tackle. To prevent the blow to the head, the defender should keep their head up to where they can always see the offensive player and primarily use the shoulder and arms to make contact.

Angle tackles take place when a defender and a ball carrier are both running at an angle down the field and their paths will collide. Compared to direct contact tackles, an angle tackle is harder to make, but it is actually safer for players if done correctly. For the defender to make a legal and safe tackle, it is important to keep their head out of the tackle. Specifically, the defender's shoulder nearest to the ball carrier should make contact with the torso, leaving the other shoulder free. The head should be held behind the ball carrier, which will prevent the risk of taking the direct impact of the collision. Also, it is vital that a defender keeps eyes and head up so that they can see their opponent before contact. This also keeps the top of the head free from collision and reduces the potential impact on the neck.

## Considerations for Training

When teaching direct contact tackles, coaches should focus defenders on tackling others with their shoulder contacting with the stomach area, keeping their head to the side of the torso, and arms wrapped around the back of the offensive player. This ensures the tackle is efficient and effective while safety is upheld.

When practicing angle tackles, it is important to enforce and constantly remind defenders to keep their head up, utilize their shoulder pads, keep their chest up, and to use their legs to create power. Many football players dive or leave their feet when trying to make tackles. This is unsafe and naturally increases the chances that the head will be ducked and be the first part of the body that makes contact with other players. Keeping the chest up and using the legs to drive the defender backward is the safest and most effective way to tackle a player to the ground.

In addition to the technical points mentioned above, it is also important to follow the flow of progression when training players for the two tackles. Initially, players can practice the techniques in place with a focus on the technical points. Next, the defender runs into a still offensive player, still focusing on the technical points.

Then, the two slowly run into each other. With the practice going, they can gradually increase the speed of running until it reaches a normal speed under game situations. Once the players are able to constantly be successful in performing the tackles, the coach can put them into small-sided, half-court and full-court games.

## Conclusion

Football is a physical game bearing high risks for injury. Therefore, it is important that coaches and players are all informed and prepared for how to safely complete specific football actions, especially the tackle techniques discussed previously. Coaches have a legal duty to protect and care for athletes (Nixon, 2020). To prevent injuries for their athletes and lawsuits associated with these types of injuries, the best practice is to teach and demand fundamentally safe tackle techniques in training.

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## Submissions Welcome!

Readers are encouraged to send "Coach's Corner" submissions to *Strategies* Editor at [tlawson@shapeamerica.org](mailto:tlawson@shapeamerica.org).

The purpose of the Coach's Corner column is to feature short articles about one specific coaching lesson that readers can immediately implement with their team. Articles should contain a brief introduction, followed by quick-hitting information such as bullet points or lists. Submissions should not exceed 1,000–1,500 words (or roughly four typed, doublespaced pages).