Australia Rugby Union Level 3 Coaching Course

Tackle

The Key Factor for Effective Tackle

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Introduction

Contact skill is just one type of skill among many that is required for all players on the field in the game of rugby. Within that category, the tackle is a skill that if even one player is found wanting in capability a gap is found and the defense can be picked apart by the opposition. Unfortunately, the skill of facing down and stopping an opposition player running forward at full speed is one that is both very difficult to teach and to acquire. To stop an opponent requires not only a sharp mind to adjust to speed and direction change of the opponent but also the physical endurance with withstand the impact and the mental toughness to overcome the pain that comes with it. The goal of this paper is, by breaking down the tackle into two required areas of physical fitness and technique, to examine the process of coaching and acquiring effective tackle skill based on past research and game analysis.

Physicality of the Tackle

Among physical requirements in the tackle, it goes without saying that the physical capability to accurately tackle throughout the game is a necessity. Austin\(^1\) and colleagues reported that the distance covered by rugby athletes in a game was between 4218 and 6389 meters. This includes from low-intensity running such as jogging and walking to high-intensity running such as sprinting. Although there are differences depending on each position, all players on the field need to have a high level of running fitness.

In addition, in the study of physical fitness factors and tackle skills, Gabbetta\(^2\) reported that the accuracy of tackle skill in a rugby league player under fatigue was found to have a significant correlation with lower body strength, and suggested that tackle accuracy can be maintained even in a state of accumulated fatigue.

“Players with greater relative lower-body strength (i.e. 4RM squat/kg) had the best tackling ability under fatigued conditions. These findings suggest that lower-body strength protects against fatigue-induced decrements in tackling ability. “

In this way, it is clear that there is a relationship between physical fitness and skill in the tackle, the quality of a tackle relies not only upon technique and tactics, but also highly upon fitness
level. In order to improve tackling skills, it is necessary to improve not only the technical and tactical fronts but also physical fitness.

**Technicality of the Tackle**

For tackle skills, we analyzed the cause of individual errors that lead to missed tackles in Japanese university rugby players. Here, we show the results from 10 games, or 20 teams, in the Japanese National University Rugby Championship tournament.

Among the missed tackles, 34% (168 tackles) were a result of losing bind before the tackle was established, allowing the opposition to continue driving forward. When that occurs, one can see the tackler going to ground before the opposition and losing grip on the opponent’s legs. In addition, in the situation where the defender releases the ball carrier as he goes to ground, the ball carrier is able to again get up and progress forward on momentum. The tackler must maintain his grip/bind until the ruck is established. Especially common were situations where the tackler only made a shoulder hit, attempted to bind at a poor location, was not able to grip the jersey or shorts, or let the opponent’s leg slip through his grip. If a defender is attempting to
tackle a carrier’s legs, s/he must keep his elbows in and sharply pull the opponent’s legs toward her/his own chest.

The next most common feature was tracking, with tackles caused by tracking comprising of roughly 23% of the missed tackles. Tracking refers to the approach toward the opponent before contact takes place; if this is not done well, it is common for the defender’s legs to stop and prevent her/him from getting in close enough to tackle.
In order to generate power the power from the lower body as opposed to the upper body (as mentioned in the research above), a defender must make a hard step as close as possible to the ball carrier. One more important piece of tracking is preventing one’s steps from becoming too wide apart. To suit your impact to the opposition’s position, you must take short, quick steps and follow their movements.

**Key Points for Tracking**

1. **Keep feet alive, no planting**
2. **Hands in tight, elbows in**
3. **Get in tight with the lead foot**
4. **Head up, sight target**
5. **Cheek to cheek**

The third most common cause of missed tackles was tacklers dropping their heads in preparing. 17% of missed tackles were caused by players looking down. By lowering their heads, players are unable to see what is going on around them, and cannot make decisions aptly, which means that they are unable to react to distance or small changes in direction the opponent, leading to missed tackles. It can be said in all Open Skill Sports that all skills require vision.
Additionally, in order to make a dominant tackle, it is necessary to hit an opponent’s center of balance, further requiring visibility of the opponent until the moment of contact. Keeping one’s head up in the tackle is also a fundamentally important part of the tackle for safety reasons, as losing vision of an opponent can lead to tackling with the head on the wrong side, which is a major cause of concussion and spinal damage.

The fourth most common cause of missed tackles was the No Shoulder Hit, comprising of 13% of missed tackles. It was quite common to see players going into a tackle but failing to make contact with their shoulder, leading to the tackle simply being broken or the ball carrier being able to continue driving her/his legs.
The final cause of missed tackles measured was the lack of leg drive in the tackle, which was followed by cases of being knocked over in the tackle or being shaken off by the ball carrier. This could also be considered failure to stop an opponent’s momentum because of poor foot movement.

From what we see among the causes of mistakes as listed above, vision, reaction and reflex necessary for decision-making, foot-use in the tracking up to the point of contact, and binding in the tackle can be thought as critical aspects in tackle performance, and overall cognitive ability and motor control are required traits. Players have to make sure the followed key points for tackling.

**Key Points to Tackle Technique**

1. Shorten steps and stay balanced on your toes
2. Get lead (front leg) forward. Front leg weight going forward, back leg is used for stability
3. Place lead leg close to the attacker – this creates “aggressive go forward” tackling
4. Same leg same shoulder
5. Create shoulder contact as soon as possible
6. Hit low and depower by picking up a leg if possible

**Conclusion**

This paper broke the tackle down into the areas of physical and technical, as well as making clear the major causes of missed tackles. In the physical area, it is seen that not only total body fitness but particularly lower body power becomes the deciding factor in the strength of a tackle. In the technical area, we can see from individual failed tackled that the skill of tackling requires a complex combination of cognitive ability and manipulation. Players should obtain the both physical and technical areas for effective tackle in the game.
References
