Level 3 Coaching Task

Skills and Drills to develop sound tackling techniques in the young Athlete
Coaching Defence in rugby is regarded as a “core skill” and as such should be implemented as soon as the young athlete starts playing. At the same time it is an aspect of the game which often is neglected early, as coaches deal with the enthusiasm and excitement a young player displays with the more appealing parts of the game such as “run, catch, pass”. This paper will focus on ways to make the skill of tackling both appealing and meaningful in the early age groups. It will then deal with consolidating these techniques and then start to bring into consideration defence patterns.

All coaches should be aware that coaching defence has as its main focus “safety” and “aims to maximise the amount of time players spend on the pitch and minimise the number of injuries they suffer with practical advice about preparing properly and learning correct techniques. It is with this in mind that the very first lessons on defence (which are introduced in Mini Rugby) should involve correct technique. Each player should be made aware of these techniques in tackling as soon as they start this pathway in the game of Rugby.

Tackling for the 8-13 year olds

As Athletes begin this stage of their rugby development many will lack the confidence needed to tackle and the desire to want to learn. It is up to the coach to make this element of the game both fun and a productive learning environment. Below are four drills which will provide this.

**Training Drill Options**

**Drill 1: Side On Tackle (Drill can be progressed to front on Tackle)**

**Aim:** Teach the correct Technique in tackling

**Equipment:** Contact Suits may be used

Players to form pair three metres apart. The sequence below should be continually emphasised to the athlete.
- Hit with the shoulder
- Lock with the arms stick
- Drive with the legs

One player will start on their knees. Partner will be stationary sideways to defender who chooses the shoulder, which will cause his head to be cushioned on the buttocks of attacker, and makes the tackle. Tackles will be made on both shoulders and then players will reverse their roles. This will progress from kneeling to walking to running. When doing this drill for the front on tackle the defender should be on one knee and the attacker walks,runs at the side where the knee is on the ground.

**Introduction of Crash Mats**

During this standard drill some athletes will find it difficult as the progression occurs. They may need some form of confidence boost and the use of crash mats is an excellent idea. As a coach this can be used as an encouragement tool as the athlete applies themselves to the teaching points of the tackle, these may be introduced. Be sure to have them at training as an incentive.

**Drill 2**

**Minor Game on Crash Mats**

**Aim:** 1) gets the athlete making first contact with shoulder  
2) Introduce competition and fun

All athletes on the crash mat (6-8 is a good number). They have to be moving around on their knees with hands behind their back. The target area for them is to hit another player between the hip and knee with their shoulder in an attempt to knock them off balance. If this occurs they are out and the last one still moving is the winner. This game can be varied e.g. Two teams or one defender against the clock. Games like this maintain interest and keep the element of fun in the skill of tackling for this age group.
Drill 3 Use of Crash Mat to improve tackling technique

**Aim:**
1) Gain confidence
2) Develop concept of defensive channel

**Equipment:**
- Crash Mats
- Rugby Balls
- Contact Suits

In this drill you would set up crash mats with a channel in between (1-2 metres wide to start, then progressively widen) and have the athlete making front on tackles (it can be used for side on as well). As you develop this drill you may also use it as a means to explain a defensive channel. This drill could then be advanced to more than one crash mat where you set up channels and the backline runs into those channels and the tackles. This introduces such elements in the tackle as timing, being in the right position to make contact with the shoulder and getting the athlete to understand which shoulder to use in backline defence.

**Introduction of Sandpits and/or the beach**

This is also a good way for young players to learn sound tackling techniques. Similar drills as mentioned above could be used. The ability to be able to draw lines in the sand can also help the coach reinforce the channels and with young players the concept of rewards being applied such as a swim may help with application.

**Tackling for the 13-18 year old**

Defence drills for this age group can be particularly difficult as the strength difference and size is a significant factor. Many players in this age group will loose confidence and may even give up as they struggle with injuries. A lot of these injuries and lack of confidence are brought about as a result of poor tackling techniques. It is with this in mind that many of the drills and usage of crash mats and sandpits still have an important part to play in this age group. A young player who has been through the progression of sound tackling techniques may often struggle in this age group with putting his body in the right position to make the tackle. This is where the concept of “tracking” becomes very important. “The best form of tackling/defence practice is probably better perfected in actual ‘man on man’ training. This however, due to possible injury may not be always practical”. The use of Contact Suits, Hit Shields, Chest Plates and tackle bags are a significant aid.

Drill 1 Revision of basic tackle technique before introducing tracking.

**Basic Tackle Technique**

This drill involves the defender on 1 knee. Key learning points such as

- Hands up, chin up
- Load up by coming down slightly in the hips just prior to contact
- Pick a target area and aim through it
- Hit, Stick, Squeeze
- Progression can be to finish in the jackal position or do it live on the feet

**Reference** Australian Rugby HPU Skill development models 2005

As a coach of this age group it is important to instil in the player “that the tackle is not complete till you get to your feet and have a go at the ball”. In the case of arriving players being to quick we must complete the tackle by rolling away.

As a coach when performing this drill with young player you may be able to detect issues such as poor technique and/or a lack of confidence in contact. The later may need a revisit to what I call “confidence boosters” in the form of crash mats and/or sandpits.
**Drill 2**

*Tracking*

**Equipment**
- Witches hats
- Rugby balls
- Contact suits
- Crash mats

In this drill you would set up channels starting at 3 metres wide and gradually increasing to a five-metre channel (this can also be utilised down the beach where you could draw channels in the sand). Introduce a defender and an attacker and begin with simple one v one-tackle and build it up to introduce a ball and more defenders and attackers running in their channel. Emphasise the following points:

- Inside Shoulder (attacker is on the outside of the defender in relation to where the ball is coming from).
- Take the space forward
- Steady once a target area is chosen with shorter steps (don’t plant feet)
- Body weight slightly forward- eyes on target through to the hit
- Stay tall and dip from the knees and hip
- Re-accelerate once the attacker has been fixed into a zone
- Shoulder contact first
- Hit, stick squeeze

*Reference* Australian Rugby HPU Skill development models 2005

Coaches may use contact suits for those lacking confidence in contact and crash mats for those lacking confidence and not being able to visualise the channel.

**Defence Patterns for 13-18 year olds**

As a player enters this age group it is most important that they understand and can execute the concept of Man on Defence before you introduce other defence patterns. Then you would attempt to make your players aware of a number of patterns from set play which would suit the skill and ability of the team.

**Scrum Defence**

Players should adapt Man on defence anywhere within there own half. Key cues for this are

- Align inside shoulder
- Must maintain inside pressure once your man has passed
- Number 8 and blindside winger are second line of defence
- Number 15 is third line of defence

Two other forms of defence are recommended from scrums. In the oppositions half you may opt for one out defence (Drift). Key cues for this are

- 7 takes 5/8
- 8 covers 7 on 5/8 before progressing across on shallow cover
- Wing also on shallow cover inside ball
- Fielding kicks fullback covers box and centre field. Openside winger covers open kick with fullback as support player.

As players become familiar with the one out defence you may elect to to have your O/C perform a “shockhit” on 5/8. In this pattern the 5/8 and I/C then play one out.
**Line out Defence**

Line out defence for this age group should involve one out or drift in most cases except for defending in your own 22 where man on man is recommended. Again the most important cues to emphasise in one out defence are

- Deny time and space - pressure
- No 7 in lineout or last man on 5/8
- Move up and out
- Maintain inside pressure
- Hooker and no 5 inside pressure
- Half and wing inside ball second line
- Fullback is third line of defence

**Ruck and Maul Defence**

Defence in ruck and maul situations should be man on man. Key cues would be

- Call out players
- Stand half a metre behind ruck-maul but move up quickly
- Get off line
- Angle on inside shoulder
- Move up and deny time and space
- Pressure both sides of field

**Conclusion**

In conclusion as a coach of young players we must always strive to place a major emphasis on technique and in doing this defence patterns may have less than a desired amount of preparation time. Individual tackling skills are paramount in the young player and as a result such aids as crashmats, sandpits and the beach are of enormous value in maintaining interest and building confidence.
Bibliography

- Rugby football union official website. Tackling Safety aims to keep more players on the pitch by Simon Mills.
- NSW Rugby Union Skills/Drills update