

Tackling Technique - 'Start to stop thinking about it.'

**By
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In 2000 he came to the RFU as U19 coach/manager and has been in charge of the 7s squad for the past three years. He is now with the full international squad as a coach.

When watching or coaching rugby, you want your defending players to be able to make the decision to 'attempt' a tackle and execute the tackle with correct technique all in one simultaneous action. What you don't want is to have your players (whatever the age) ponder over how and when they should make the tackle. "Do I lead with my left foot and hit with my right shoulder or do I hit with my left and lead with my left foot? Should it be left or right foot first?" "Do I plant my foot and hit with the opposite shoulder or not?" "Where do I put my head?" "How close do I get my feet?" At the same time as these questions are going through a player's mind, the coach, and on occasions the defender's own team mates, are screaming that well-known slogan of a famous sports company..... "Just do it!" Worse still, the thought process takes longer than the time the defender has to make any attempt at all and the result is usually a missed tackle.

While any completed tackle is 100% better than a technically correct attempt that fails, the ideal is that your defender decides to make the tackle *and* executes the tackle with the technique that turns the attempt into a successful tackle and, better still, a dominant tackle. In short it becomes second nature.

Tackling is not about timing - it's about disrupting someone else's.

So you want to coach your defenders and provide them with the techniques that, when practised (repeatedly and in game-like situations), the techniques become 'second nature'.

Here is **one** option or technique to consider when coaching the player to execute an effective and, hopefully, dominant tackle.

Make the tackle by initiating contact with the same shoulder as your lead foot.



While this may go against many of the common theories and practices of tackling technique – that of hitting with the opposite shoulder to the lead leg, developed to simulate a biomechanical power drive similar to that of a javelin thrower - it does have the following potential benefits:

- **Encourages the defender to get his lead foot and, therefore, his whole body, closer to the ball carrier** – Coach the defender to try to get his front foot (right or left) not only close to the ball carrier but also in the middle of his opponent's body (whether tackling side or front on). This reduces the chance of the defender being stepped.
- **Deters the defender from planting both feet or leaving his feet (diving at the ball carrier) too early** - If you can see a player's studs while he makes the tackle he has stopped generating power in the hit and is less likely to make a dominant tackle and it is probable that the ball carrier has already won the collision.
- **The closer the defender is to the ball carrier, the more of his own body weight he can use to effect a dominant tackle** – Key here is to coach the player to keep his focus on the target area (the ball) for longer and, in so doing, keep his head up. The defender should naturally put his head to the opposite side to that of his lead leg/foot and the shoulder that he makes the hit with. Coach the defender to use short strides/steps and to be on his toes immediately before contact. Again, this reduces the chance of the defender 'planting' both feet and having reduced power with which to effect the tackle.
- **The closer the defender is and the longer he keeps his head up, the more chance he has to stop the offload.**

Good defenders are usually the ones who enjoy defending, enjoy the hit and are the ones who enjoy winning the little battles within the game. Enjoyment normally comes from having experienced early success at something. If that is the case, then the earlier a player becomes technically proficient at a skill (based on sound theory!) and the earlier that player can execute that skill without worrying or thinking too much about what he is doing, the better the chances of his and the team's success.

'Practice doesn't make perfect; only perfect practice makes perfect.'

