TRAINING TO COMPETE:
COACHING CORE SKILLS FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE

TACKLING / DEFENCE SKILLS
SESSION PLANS

These coaching plans contain a series of progressive sessions and practices designed to improve the core technical skills of rugby players who are embarking on the elite development pathway. Sessions and individual practices can be adapted for players of all ages and experience.

Each session has an identified aim, and individual practices have specific objectives which will help to achieve that aim. Diagrams and explanations outline the organisation of each practice and key coaching points are specified.

- All sessions can be delivered as part of a coaching programme.
- Individual sessions can be used to improve a specific area.
- Individual practices can be used to meet the development needs of individual players.

This is one of three core technical skills programmes designed by the RFU National Academy Coaches and should be used in conjunction with the “Training to Compete” DVD.

KEY TO DIAGRAMS:

- COACH
- DEFENDING PLAYER
- ATTACKING PLAYER
- PLAYER ON GROUND
- BALL
- TACKLE SHIELD
- TACKLE BAG (ON FLOOR / UPRIGHT)
- PLAYER MOVEMENT
- BALL MOVEMENT
- CONTACT
- CONTACT AREA
- CONE
### Tackling/Defence Skills

#### SESSION 1 - Tracking

**Aim:** To introduce the notion of Tracking.

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</table>
| **Practice 1**<br>Introduce the notion of TRACKING | ![Diagram](Image1) Tracking: In pairs facing each other, player tracks opponent by following/mirroring their running lines and uses a two-handed touch as a tackle. | • Control movement all time  
• Tackler has to stay in mirror position  
• Track/Follow the player to the point of contact  
• Keep balanced on toes  
• Avoid planting both feet  
• Close enough to make an effective tackle |
| **Practice 2**<br>RUGBY KABADI! To develop tracking and working together in defence | ![Diagram](Image2) Attackers run from one line to the other avoiding getting touched. When touched, the player joins hands with the defender to track down other attackers. Split into two groups of three when six defenders. Try to catch all players. | • Track an attacker  
• Movement – balanced and accelerate together into the tackle  
• Communication – work as a team to keep shape  
• Anticipation  
• Close down space and time  
• Work as a team - move as fast as the slowest person |
| **Practice 3**<br>To develop individual understanding of who and when to tackle - introduce ‘hunt a tackle’! | ![Diagram](Image3) 6 players move around the grid handling the ball, passing in any direction. 2 Defenders try to touch players in possession of the ball. Work individually and progress to working together. | • Close down time and space  
• Anticipate who to tackle  
• Timing – to arrive with ball – man and ball together  
• Anticipate blind spots and come at the ball from sideways.  
• Two players work together - communicate  
• Track the ball carrier |
# Tackling/Defence Skills
## SESSION 2 - Tackle Technique

**Aim:** To introduce the basic tackle technique – foot positioning and body positioning

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| **Practice 4**  
To develop foot positioning and body positioning for the tackle | ![Diagram](image1)  
1v1 Tackler has arms behind back and drives into tackle shield with correct foot position from 2m.  
Progress from walking to jogging - introduce the notion of three small steps whilst the shoulder is in contact with the Shield.  
Consider how best to hold the tackle shield. | Foot Positioning:  
- Shorten the steps nearer the target.  
- Stride/step into the split to initiate the tackle (avoid jumping and planting both feet)  
- Feet close in – strong base  
- Same leg, same shoulder  
- Stay big  
- Head is always up  
- Focus on chest hitting pad  
Body Positioning:  
- Stay ‘Big’ for as long as possible - Knees bent, body upright, sink at the hips  
- Head up, eyes open, chin off chest (No ducking of the head)  
- Hips square - Belt Buckles facing the target  
- Focus on the impact area for the shoulder.  
- Head close to the side of target  
- Head close, shoulders will follow close  
- Drive through the tackle with three small steps to keep the feet on the ground – ‘Feet to purchase on the ground’.  
- Head in line with spine  
- Eliminate mid air diving into the tackle |

| **Practice 5**  
To introduce boxer Hands | ![Diagram](image2)  
Working in pairs, one suit between two. Tackler walks towards the attacker who is holding ball behind his back. Execute the tackle and knock the ball to the ground.  
Progress to ball carrier changing his angle so that tackler has to alternate tackling shoulder. |  
- Hands up and in front of the body like ‘boxer’s hands’  
- Arms and hands shoot forward quickly on contact with shoulder.  
- Strong grip  
- Squeeze arms  
N.B. Only after the feet are in Place and the body sinks, then Shoulder makes impact can the hands attempt to knock the ball down (avoid arms ‘fishing’ for the ball)  
Practice sequence of the tackle:  
- Foot position  
- Body position with hips square  
- Shoulder contact  
- Drive  
- Hands and arms grip tightly  
Progress to gaining feedback from partner (reciprocal coaching) |
### Tackling/Defence Skills

#### SESSION 3 - Offensive & Passive Front Tackle

**Aim:** To develop the use of the arms and introduce the leg lift and leg drive. Focus on the impact area and the use of the grip tackle.

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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Practice 6</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>To revise Tracking exercise and Tackle Technique.</strong>&lt;br&gt;3v3 Revise tracking and tackle technique&lt;br&gt;Coach (using hand signals) controls attackers holding shields.</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>• Defenders work together as a line&lt;br&gt;• Communicate&lt;br&gt;• Hit together&lt;br&gt;• Concentrate on good tackle technique&lt;br&gt;• Head up, eyes open&lt;br&gt;• Foot in close between split - same foot, same shoulder&lt;br&gt;• Body position with hips square&lt;br&gt;• Shoulder contact with head to the side&lt;br&gt;• Boxer hands - arms grip tightly&lt;br&gt;• Drive</td>
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| Practice 7<br>**Emphasise use of arms, leg lift and drive**<br>1 v 1 attacker in tackle suit.<br>Progress to use ball and compete for possession after completion of the tackle. | ![Diagram](image2.png) | • Revise tackle technique<br>• Head and leg lift on same side<br>• Hook the leg at the short base of the hamstring, just above the knee to off balance the attacker<br>• Drive through with ‘lawn mower’ action of arm lifting leg<br>• Maintain strong grip with both hands<br>Progress to use ball and compete for possession after completion of the tackle. | • Target shoulder just below the ball<br>• Drive feet through the tackle<br>• Put attacker on to his back<br>• Follow through to land on the attacker<br>• Encourage ‘RELOAD’ principle with players back on feet ready to compete for the ball |
Practice 8
Introduce the Passive Front Tackle

1 v 1 with attacker in tackle suit.
Ball held by the attacker in two hands.
Start with walking pace and build up to 75%.
Attackers must attempt to keep moving forward and must not stop when being tackled.

- Stay Tall and position head close to the side of the body
- Foot close to attacker – same foot same shoulder
- Head to the side
- Hit with shoulder
- Tight grip with arms and hands
- Use attackers momentum to fall back and turn tackler on his back
- Head tight against attackers buttocks
- Complete tackle fully before ‘reloading’
- Reload onto feet and compete for the ball
### SESSION 4 - Introduce Side & Rear Tackles

**Aim:** To introduce the use of different Tackle Techniques – Side Tackle – Rear Tackle

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| Practice 9 Revise Tracking and Front Tackle Technique. | ![Diagram](image1.png) | • Defenders work together as a line  
• Communicate  
• Equal spacing between tacklers  
• Hit together  
• Concentrate on good tackle technique  
• Head up, eyes open  
• Foot in close between split - same foot, same shoulder  
• Body position with hips square  
• Shoulder contact with head to the side  
• Boxer hands - arms grip tightly  
• Drive |

4 v 4 - Coach controls attackers with commands. Tacklers change their position after each tackle.

| Practice 10 Introduce the Side Tackle | ![Diagram](image2.png) | • Stay Tall with feet in close  
• Head behind the attacker  
• Strong grip  
• Hit with shoulder aiming for the thigh (between knees and hips)  
• Strong hand and arm grip  
• Drive through with the legs (avoid diving into the tackle)  
• Complete the tackle - tackle to the ground  
• ‘Reload’ on to feet quickly to compete for the ball |

1 v 1 with attacker in tackle suit.  
*Ball held by the attacker in the furthest hand.*  
Start with walking pace and build up to 75%.  
Attackers must attempt to keep moving forward and must not stop when being tackled.  
Tackle from both sides, off both shoulders

Progress to tackling an attacker who attempts to fend/hand-off.

*Core Skills Curriculum – Tackling / Defence Skills – Jon Callard 2007*
Practice 11
Introduce the Rear Tackle chasing back from behind the attacker

1 v 1 with attacker in tackle suit. Ball held by the attacker in two hands. Start with walking pace and build up to 75%. Attackers must attempt to keep moving forward and must not stop when being tackled.

- Feet close
- Strong grip – tight with arms and hands
- Start at waste and slide down
- Head on top or to side and tight to the legs
- Keep attackers legs to the side of the tackler’s body
- Complete tackle fully before ‘reloading’
- Reload onto feet and compete for the ball

Practice 12
Practice a front, side and rear tackle under pressure

Three channels with the defender practicing a front tackle, a side tackle and a rear tackle under pressure.

- Emphasise good tackle technique in all three tackles - front, side and rear
**Aim:** Introduce the use of defensive Guard tackle techniques and the Drift Defensive System

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<td><strong>Practice 13</strong> &lt;br&gt;Develop the technique for a passive guard tackle: Outside 22m area - the aim is to give a metre in contact to isolate the ball carrier and attack the ball.</td>
<td><a href="#">Image of practice scenario</a> &lt;br&gt;Attacker picks up ball from ruck position and drives forward. Guard tackler starts in a three point defensive position. Use a tackle bag as a ruck indicator. The attacker must start behind the bag.</td>
<td>• Stay low using 3-point stance &lt;br&gt;• Do not give the attacker any indication of your intention. &lt;br&gt;• Concede a metre to your advantage. &lt;br&gt;• Explode to a higher position - lean forward with a wide base - feet offset and split. &lt;br&gt;• Attack back of the shoulders and pull down with strong grip. &lt;br&gt;• Attack the ball - clamp the ball underneath the attackers chest &lt;br&gt;• Keep head low and close to the attacker’s body. &lt;br&gt;• Spine in line.</td>
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| **Practice 14** <br>Develop the technique for the Impact Guard Tackle: Inside the 22m area or close to the try line where ground cannot be conceded. Sometimes two men need to tackle | [Image of practice scenario](#) <br>As 1 v 1 but build up to 2 v 1. Progress to develop impact tackle with leg drive into the ruck. | • Stay low from 3-point stance. <br>• Explode early into the space and stay on feet (no diving or lunging forward) <br>• Short fast steps. <br>• Tackler’s head up, to the side, eyes open and spine in line. <br>• Sink at knees & bend at waist to stay lower than attacker <br>• Stay low and use leg lift tackle back into the ruck. <br>• Drive attacker back into his own players who are lying on the ground in the ruck. |
**Practice 15**

Develop
‘Heads Up’ Defence and introduce the Drift or In to Out defensive system (simple drift from the inside to out)

4 v 3. Starting together players from both teams run out and form an attacking line and a defensive line. Attacking team has more numbers and can only pass ball at this stage.

- ‘Heads up’ defence means that each defender must LOOK (scan) between the ball and the attacking alignment to number off
- Usually use drift defence when less defenders than attackers
- Defenders need to be slightly staggered i.e. slightly behind the defender inside
- Defenders align with outside foot forward and opposite inside shoulder of attacker
- Spacing is important - mark as much space as possible – end defender sets width of line
- Start from an on-side position
- Point at attacker and communicate
- Line speed is important and is set by inside defender
- All players must take the space first – Up then Out - 1st two steps must be forward
- 1st defender initiates the drift only when his man has passed the ball
- Communicate and trust your support defender on the inside
- Inside defenders must work hard
- Defenders can tackle if appropriate
- Aim for good tackle technique
- Touchline is another defender

**Practice 16**

Practice Guard Tackle technique in a conditioned defence Game Situation

Practice Drift Defensive system in a conditioned defence Game Situation

Normal game rules - encourage players to play. Defenders execute Guard defence technique and then drift defensive system. Coach gives feedback on effectiveness of defence. The coach must set up the situational exercises during the game

- Encourage all types of tackle techniques.
- Ensure correct tackle technique.
- Ensure correct situational tackle e.g. side, front, rear tackles and guard tackles, etc
- Condition the defence to practice Guard tackles from different positions on the field.
- Condition the defence to practice the Drift defensive system and stress the key coaching points in practice 15 above.
### Tackling/Defence Skills

#### SESSION 6 - Impact Tackle & Man on Man System

**Aim:** Introduce the basic technique and body mechanics of the Impact Tackle. Introduce the Man on Man Defensive System

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| **Practice 17 (A)** Revise feet/body/arm positions with head on tackle. | ![Image](image1.png) **1 v 1 facing each other. One player holding a shield, the other 2m away. Players advance towards each other (walking/jogging). Hit just underneath the ridge on the contact pad. Alternate both shoulders.** | • Head up and eyes open  
• Square hips  
• Body upright with hips sunken slightly and knees bent.  
• Lead foot into split - close to attacker  
• Follow the attacker to the point of contact – hit below ridge of shield  
• Shoulder contact & grab with arms  
• Shorten the steps nearer the target.  
• Stride step into split to initiate tackle.  
• Leg as close into split as possible  
• Head up  
• Hips and body straight in line  
• Focus on hitting pad with chest, shoulder and arm to spread impact  
• Stay big and tall until last moment  
• Good use of arms to wrap up ball, preventing offloads (Strong grip)  
• Hands up high and in front of the body (Boxer hands)  
• On impact move the arms quickly through and round the ball carrier  
• Other arm wraps around the back  
• Drive hard with the legs keeping feet to ground |
| **Practice 17 (B)** Introduce body position and arm action. To focus on the contact with chest/shoulder and arm | ![Image](image2.png) **1 v 1 facing each other. One player holding a shield, the other 2m away. Hit just underneath the ridge on the contact pad. Alternate both shoulders.** |  |
| **Practice 17 (C)** To introduce The squeeze with leg drive | ![Image](image3.png) **1 v 1 with safety support player. Attacker, wearing suit, takes the full impact tackle and support player stays behind attacker for safety reasons (to stop him being ‘dumped’)** | • Stress the impact  
• Increase contact  
• On contact squeeze arms  
• Drive legs  
• NO spear tackles, i.e. hips higher than shoulders  

N.B. Sequence - Feet in place - Body sinks – Head position - Shoulder impact – grab with arms
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Practice 18</th>
<th>Introduction to the Man on Man – Flat Four Defensive System.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART 1</strong></td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PART 2</strong></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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- Usually Man on Man when equal numbers of attackers and defenders or more defenders
- When the ball is played, the defensive line races forward and takes the man opposite
- Defensive alignment with outside foot forward – opposite outside (or inside) shoulder of attacker but must all do the same
- Point and communicate (press)
- Line speed is important – straight up (create pressure)
- A flat defensive line moving up together – the shape of the line is important

4 v 4 - Starting together players from both teams run out and form an attacking line and a defensive line. Flat four because the winger is standing up in the defensive line. Usually when equal numbers of attackers and defenders, or more defenders.

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<th>Practice 19</th>
<th>Practice the Impact Tackle in Conditioned Defence Game Situation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Normal game rules - encourage players to play. Defenders execute Impact Tackle technique and the Man on Man defensive system. Coach gives feedback on effectiveness of defence. The coach here must set up the situational exercises during the game.</strong></td>
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- Encourage all types of tackle techniques.
- Ensure correct tackle technique.
- Ensure correct situational tackle e.g. side, front, rear tackles, impact and guard tackles, etc
- Condition the defence to practice the Man on Man defensive system and stress the key coaching points in practice 18 above.
### SESSION 7 – 2-man tackle & Out to In System

**Aim:** Introduce different defensive systems and develop understanding of when and where to use the different systems.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Practice 20</strong>&lt;br&gt;Develop the ‘two man tackle’</td>
<td>![Diagram of two man tackle]</td>
<td>• Two man tackle when two defenders can tackle simultaneously&lt;br&gt;• Support tackler must make a decision based on what he sees&lt;br&gt;• If tackler goes low, support tackler goes high&lt;br&gt;• If tackler goes high, support tackler goes low&lt;br&gt;• Communicate&lt;br&gt;• One tackle low around the legs&lt;br&gt;• One tackle high attacking the ball&lt;br&gt;• Leg drive together&lt;br&gt;• Stop the off-load&lt;br&gt;• Tackler who attacks the ball must compete for the turnover</td>
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<td>Attacker carrying the ball in two hands in front – attack the gap between both defenders. Attack from left then right.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Practice 21</strong>&lt;br&gt;Develop decision making of tacklers in a game situation</td>
<td>![Diagram of 3v3 game]</td>
<td>• As above&lt;br&gt;• Tacklers must make the tackle and stop the off-load&lt;br&gt;• Tacklers must make appropriate decisions to stop, tackle, clamp or dislodge the ball from the attacker&lt;br&gt;• Hit and wrap the ball&lt;br&gt;• Tackler near the ball goes high</td>
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<td>Game of 3 v 3 – Attackers wear tackle suits. Middle attacker attacks the gap. Defenders try to double/two man tackle and must stop the off load</td>
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**Practice 22**
To introduce the **OUT TO IN** defensive system

4 v 4 plus a covering fullback. Starting all together, players from both teams run out and form an attacking line and a defensive line.

- The aim of OUT to IN defence is to force the ball back inside and stop it from getting to the wide men.
- This system is usually used when the numbers are equal, when the defence is outnumbered or when very close to the defending team's goal line.
- Defenders align with outside foot forward and opposite outside shoulder of attackers.
- The outside defenders sets the line speed and leads the defence.
- Defenders go up and in to create a vacuum for the attackers to run into.
- A fast line speed is very important for the outside defenders.
- Outside attackers are left for sweepers (covering blind side wing and full back).

**Practice 23**
Practice the 2-man tackle in a conditioned Defence Game Situation

Practice the Out To In Defensive System in a Game Situation

Normal game rules - encourage players to play. Defenders execute 2-man tackle technique, and the Out To In defensive system. Coach gives feedback on effectiveness of defence. The coach here must set up the situational exercises during the game.

- Encourage all types of tackle techniques.
- Ensure correct tackle technique.
- Ensure correct situational tackle e.g. side, front, rear tackles, impact and two man tackles, guard tackles, etc.
- Condition the defence to practice the Out to In defensive system and stress key coaching points as in practice 22.
### Tackling/Defence Skills

**SESSION 8 – Game Situations**

**Aim:** Develop understanding of the Kick Chase; defending the counter attack, and the use of different defensive systems.

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| **Practice 24**  
Develop a ‘chase team’ and keep the attacking threat in the middle. | ![Diagram](image)  
Coach kicks the ball to the defending player.  
Four defenders (chase team) start with chests on the ground. A fifth defender next to the coach plays the chase team onside. Catcher runs at the chase team and tries to beat them. The team approaches the catcher and tries to keep him central to the line. | - Chaser puts defenders on side  
- Defensive line keeps its shape  
- Press as fast as the slowest player in the line  
- No player should step in and there should be no dog legs  
- Communicate  
- Track the catcher so that he is always in the middle of the defensive line of four  
- Complete the tackle |

| Practice 25  
Conditioned defensive game from different defensive situations (from open play or even set play) | ![Diagram](image)  
Normal game rules - encourage players to play. Coach nominates the defensive system. Defenders execute the required defensive system. Coach gives feedback on effectiveness of defence. The coach here must use his knowledge and his skill to set up the situational exercises whilst the game is going on. E.g. guard tackle situations in the out field and close to try line; kick chase with kicking allowed, etc. | - Encourage all types of tackle techniques.  
- Ensure correct tackle technique.  
- Ensure correct situational tackle e.g. side, front, rear tackles, impact and two man tackles, guard tackles, etc  
- Condition the defence to practice the appropriate defensive systems, e.g. – Drift, Man on Man, Out to In  
- Stress the key coaching points for each system |