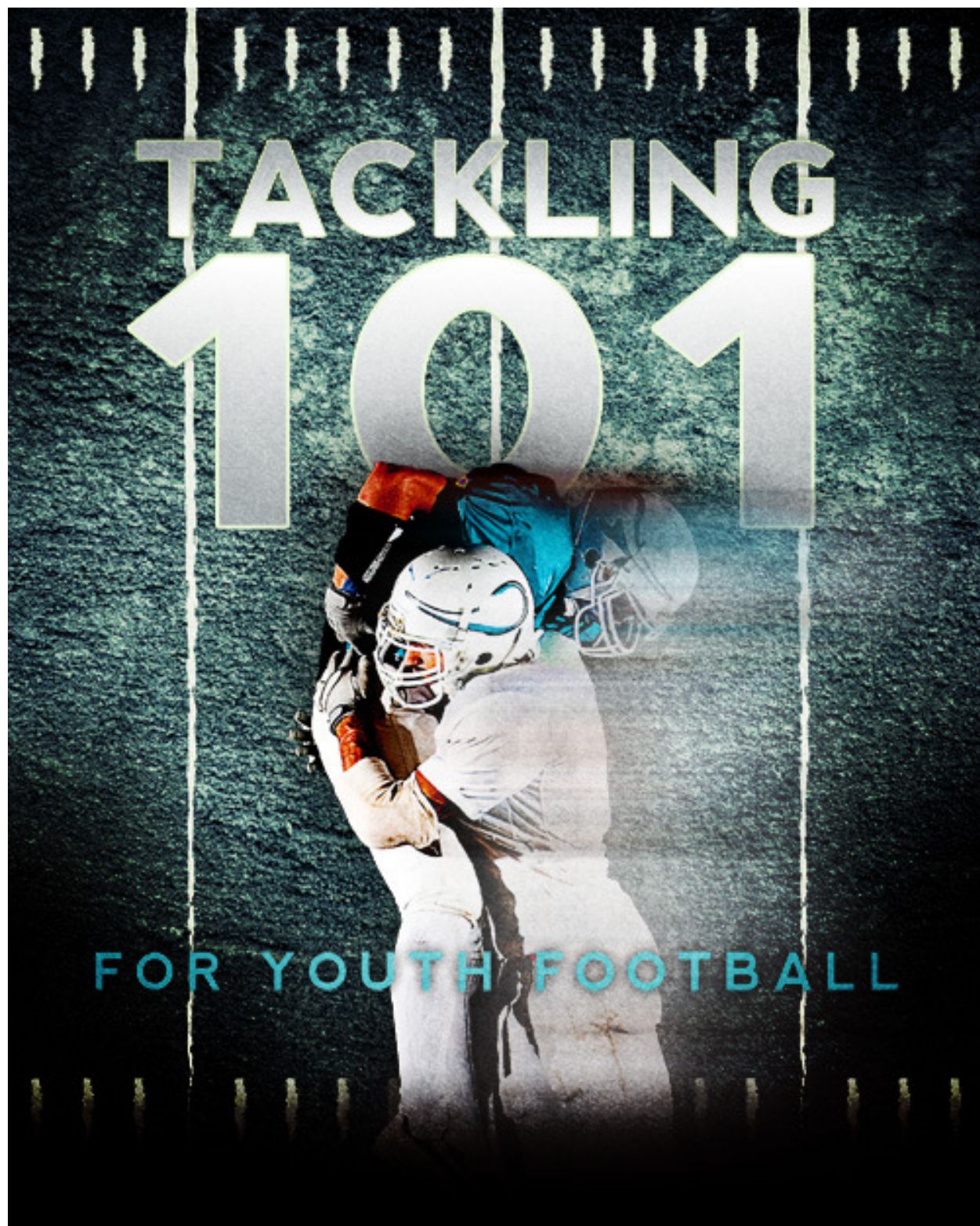




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# Tackling 101 for Youth Football

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## Tackling Technique

If you want to have an effective defense, and keep your player safe as they learn the game of football, teaching proper tackling technique should be your #1 priority.

In this section, we will review a simple step by step progression you can use to teach tackling fundamentals to young players. For a detailed video explanation of this progression, check out USA Football's Heads Up Tackling videos here:

<http://www.football-tutorials.com/how-to-tackle/>

### Step 1: Breakdown

---

The fundamental starting point for all football movements is called the "Breakdown" or "Ready Position." To teach it, try lining up your players and calling out each of the following commands one at a time:

- "Feet!" - step the feet out to shoulder width apart with the toes pointed downfield
- "Squeeze!" - squeeze the shoulder blades back and down to flatten the back and put the upper body in an athletic position
- "Sink!" - bend the knees and lower the waist, keeping the back straight, the feet flat on the ground, and the knees over the ankles
- "Hands!" - bring the hands up to chest height, with the elbows in tight, and the head and eyes up

### Step 2: Buzzing The Feet

---

To gain balance and control before contact, it's important for players to keep their feet moving and gain ground on the ball carrier.

After assuming the breakdown position, take a series of light, choppy steps while slowly moving forward. Each step should be a short, toe to heel stride, keeping the base wide and the back at a 45 degree angle.

### Step 3: Hit Position

---

Right before the tackler delivers a blow to the ball carrier, he should assume the hit position. Begin with a downhill power step, then explode up and through contact with a rising blow.

Make sure the chin and eyes are up, the chest is proud, and the shoulder blades are squeezed back. The tackler's hands should be up and wide of the target, ready to wrap up and bring the ball carrier down.

### Step 4: Shooting The Hips

---

At the point of impact, the tackler should explode off of the foot on the same side as the shoulder with which they will make the tackle. (i.e. right foot, right shoulder). Drive the shoulder into the runner's abdomen and shoot the hips up and forward to generate power.

### Step 5: Ripping The Arms

---

As the tackler makes contact, he should rip his arms explosively forward, grasp behind the legs of the ball carrier, lift him off his feet and drive him to the ground, continuing to make short, choppy steps throughout.

**It is important to note that all tackles should be made with the shoulder pad and NEVER with the helmet.**

Make sure you repeatedly stress the importance of keeping the head up and eyes open and positioning the body to tackle with one shoulder pad and never with the head.

### 3 Types of Tackles

---

There are three basic types of tackles that all defensive players will need to learn. For each one, the same 5-step progression applies: Breakdown, Buzz, Hit, Shoot and Rip.

Throughout this report we will provide more specific drills and instructions for teaching these techniques to your players. For now, here is a quick summary of each type of tackle and how they are commonly used.

## Head-On Tackle

When a defender is lined up directly across from a ball carrier, he will use the head-on tackle to stop him in his tracks. Upon contact, make sure the tackler slides his head to the outside and leads with the shoulder pad, not the helmet.

## Angle Tackle

The angle tackle is used when a ball carrier runs a wide play or gets close to the sideline. This is the most common type of tackle your defenders will use.

It's important that the tackler chooses the correct pursuit angle to cut off his target, while using the sideline as an extra defender. Upon contact, drive the head in front of the ball carrier's number, across the line of his run, and drive the shoulder upward on the runner at about waist level.

When a defender is angle tackling to his right, he should drive off the left foot and hit with the left shoulder pad. When a defender is angle tackling to his left, he should drive off the right foot and hit with the right shoulder pad.

## Open Field Tackle

When a defender is facing a ball carrier in an open field situation, he should take a conservative approach. Don't worry about driving through the ball carrier or delivering a hard blow. Focus on getting a hold of the player and preventing him from scoring.

If possible, use the sideline to pen the ball carrier in to one side of the field. Avoid lunging or diving. Stay patient, make certain where the ball carrier is going, then commit to a line of pursuit that will force him out of bounds or slow him down until help arrives.

## How To Use These Drills

---

On the following pages, we've provided 15 basic tackling drills designed for youth football players. These drills will help you teach the fundamentals of tackling in a safe, fun way that will build a foundation for many years to come.

**Keep in mind that developing fundamental tackling skills does NOT require full contact.** Many of the drills in this report are designed to be run at half speed with helmets only and no pads. Others can be modified for full contact and full pads once your players master the basics.

Ready to get started? Let's go!

## Developmental Tackling Drills

### Fit Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner

**Purpose:** To create a slow walk-through of a fundamentally sound head-on tackle, and help your defenders get used to the feeling of contact.

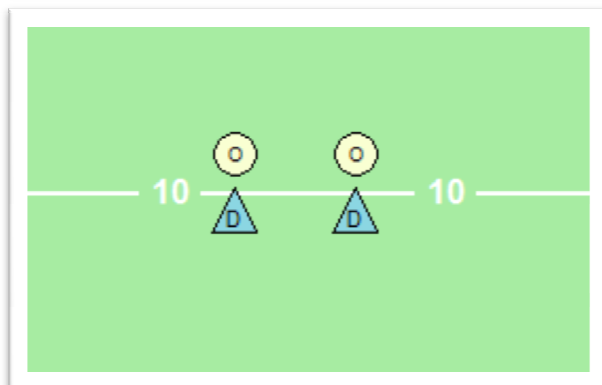
**Set up:** Have two players face each other in the breakdown position. One player is the tackler the other player is the ball carrier.

**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the tackler will assume the hit position and wrap his arms around the ball carrier.
2. Check the tackler's technique to make sure the chin and eyes are up, the chest is proud, and the shoulder blades are squeezed back. The head should be slid to one side so the impact is delivered with the shoulder.
3. On the coach's signal, the tackler will slowly drive the ball carrier backwards by taking short, choppy steps. The ball carrier will not resist, allowing himself to be driven back.

#### Coaching Tips

- This drill should be run at half speed.
- The tackler should always have his head up on contact and slide the head to ball side.
- Having a good knee and ankle bend will help with exploding from the waist.
- The tackler should keep their weight ahead of the base. So when making contact their weight can help bring the ball carrier to the ground.
- While the tackler is in the fit position their ankles should have a slight bend to prepare for contact.
- Remember that the tacklers and ball carriers heads should always be up preventing head or neck injury. No head to head contact is allowed.



## One Step Fit Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner

**Purpose:** A slow motion demonstration of the proper footwork for executing a head-on tackle.

**Set up:** The tackler should be a step away from the ball carrier. Two players should be facing each other. One player is the tackler the other player is the ball carrier.

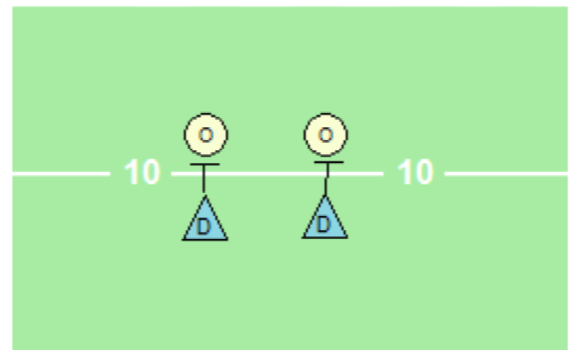
**Execution:**

1. The tackler begins in the breakdown position, then, on the coaches signal, takes a small downhill power step (or gather step) toward the ball carrier before making contact
2. Make sure the tackler steps with the foot opposite the ball if possible. As he steps forward, his weight should be out in front with his arms pulled back to strike the target.
3. Once contact is made the tackler should club his arms around the ball carrier, grabbing a hold of the jersey, lifting and driving the ball carrier back.

### Coaching Tips

- This drill should be run at half speed.
- Observe and correct for proper form, focusing on safe head position, a flat back, and a wide base.
- When introducing this drill keep the ball carrier on his feet. As your kids get more comfortable with contact, the tackler will be allowed to gently drive the ball carrier to the ground, lifting and pulling his feet to create leverage.
- Encourage your tacklers to shoot the hips up and forward as they make contact, which will provide more power.

2: One Step Fit Drill



## 4 Point Explosion Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner

**Purpose:** To teach the proper hip roll when making contact. This drill is useful for taking on blocks, shedding blocks and making tackles - all essential skills for any defensive player.

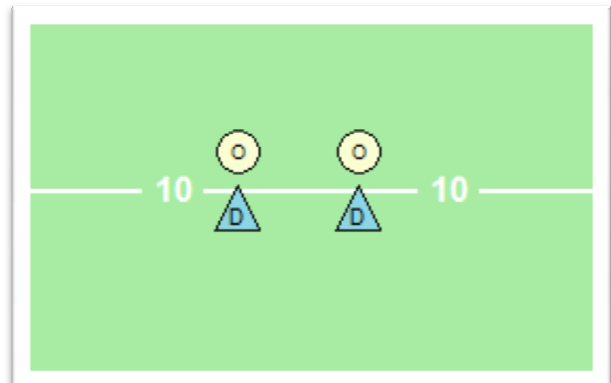
**Setup:** The tackler and ball carrier both are on their knees facing each other.

**Execution:**

1. The tackler begins by sitting back so his rear end is hovering just above his heels. His hands are up and ready for contact.
2. On the coaches signal, the tackler shoots the hips up and forward, exploding into the ball carrier and punching his chest with open palms.
3. The tackler should finish in a fully extended position, kneeling up straight with the hips over the knees

**Coaching tips:**

- Make sure the tackler keeps his fingers and thumbs up to avoid injury.
- Don't allow the tackler to dig in his toes and push from his feet. Check that his shoelaces are laying down flat on the grass to prevent this.



## Explosion Lift Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner- Intermediate

**Purpose:** To demonstrate the importance of combining the knees, ankles, and waist to develop an explosive hip roll.

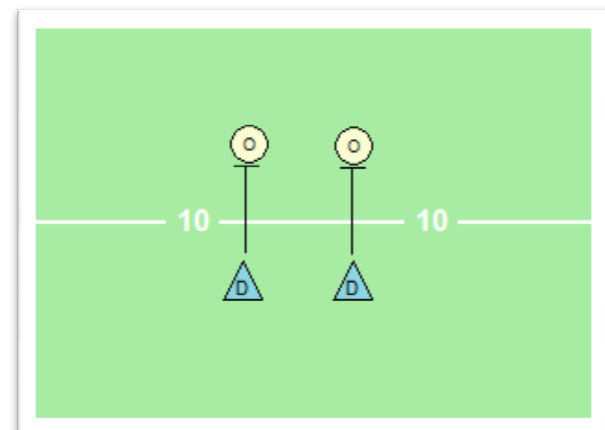
**Set up:** The tackler and ball carrier should be lined up two yards apart facing each other.

**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the tackler runs toward the ball carrier at half speed.
2. At the moment of contact, the tackler should explode from the hips with a rising blow, and drive his hands into the ball carrier's numbers, lifting him up off the ground.
3. At the same time, the ball carrier will jump in the air, allowing himself to be picked up by the tackler.
4. After the lift, the tackler should gently place the ball carrier back on the ground.

**Coaching tips:**

- This drill should be run at half speed.
- To start out, the ball carrier should time his jump to minimize the strain on the tackler and make it easier to make the lift
- The tacklers hands should be inside the ball carrier's chest numbers on contact.
- The tackler should focus on rolling his hips while engaged in contact with the runner.



## Shuffle and Lift Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner- Intermediate

**Purpose:** To focus on generating explosiveness through the hip roll, while incorporating the some of the finishing stages of the tackle

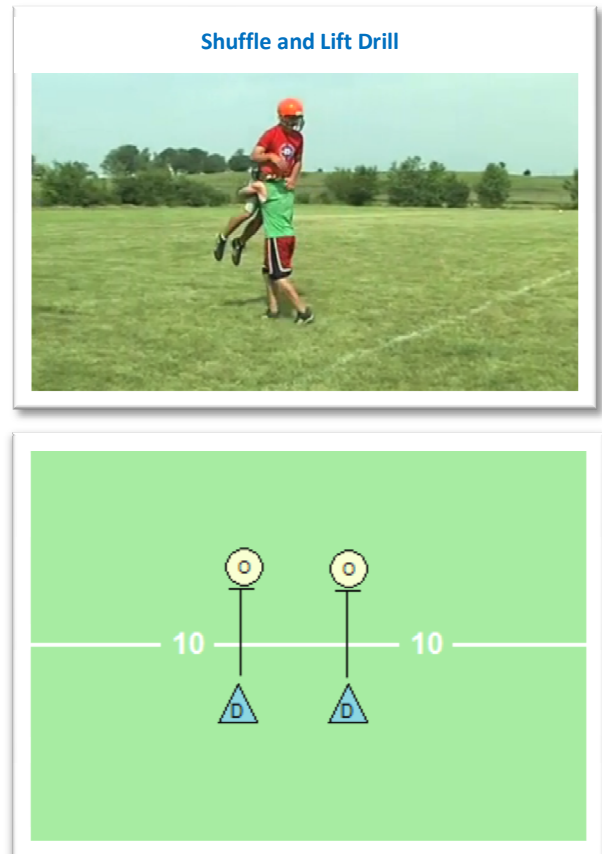
**Set up:** Similar to explosion lift drill. The tackler and ball carrier should line up five yards apart facing each other.

**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the tackler runs toward the ball carrier at half speed.
2. At the moment of contact, the tackler should explode from the hips with a rising blow, club his hands around the ball carrier, grab the back of his jersey, and lift him up off the ground
3. At the same time, the ball carrier will jump in the air, allowing himself to be picked up by the tackler.
4. The tackler will drive the ball carrier back five yards while holding him, then set him down gently

**Coaching tips:**

- This drill should be run at half speed
- To start out, the ball carrier should time his jump to minimize the strain on the tackler and make it easier to make the lift
- The tackler should focus on rolling his hips while engaged in contact with the runner.
- Make sure the tackler's head and eyes are up, and the back is flat, not rounded



## Inline Tackling Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner-Intermediate

**Purpose:** A half speed, game-like drill that simulates shedding a block, creating a pursuit angle and stopping a ball carrier at the line of scrimmage.

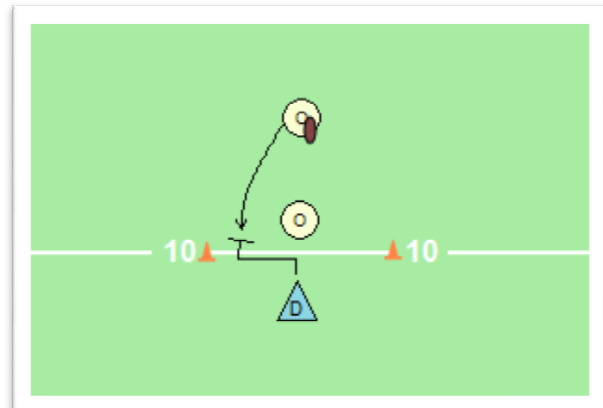
**Setup:** Set up a line of scrimmage by placing two cones five yards apart. Place a blocker between the two cones, on his knees. The ball carrier stands five yards behind the line of scrimmage. The tackler lines up opposite the blocker.

**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the ball carrier will slowly move out of the backfield, and choose a "hole" to the left or right of the offensive lineman
2. The tackler approaches the line of scrimmage and makes light contact with the offensive lineman, sheds his block, then slides to the left or right to intercept the ball carrier.
3. The tackler steps into the hole engages the ball carrier, sliding his head to the ball side, and making contact with the shoulder pad
4. The tackler shoots his hips and wraps his arms to drive the ball carrier back

**Coaching Tips**

- The offensive lineman stays on his knees and will not attempt to block the tackler
- This is a half speed drill that focuses on footwork and technique. It's not necessary to run quickly or hit hard
- The tackler should keep his head up when making contact with the blocker so he can track the approach of the ball carrier



## Angle Fit Drill

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**Difficulty:** Beginner

**Purpose:** To demonstrate the basic fundamentals for proper angle tackling.

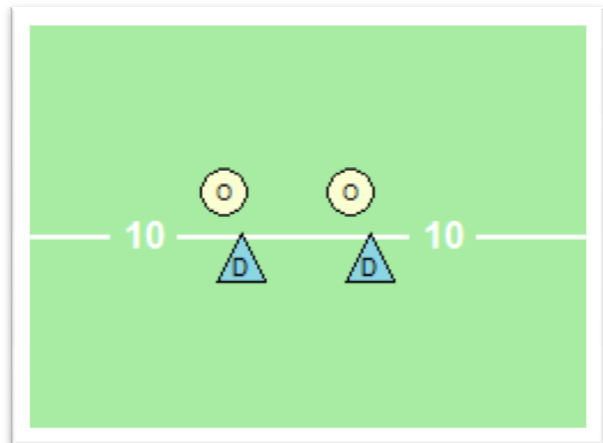
**Setup:** Have two players face each other in the breakdown position. One player is the tackler the other player is the ball carrier. The tackler will stand at a 45 degree relative to the ball carrier.

**Execution:**

1. To begin, the tackler will assume the hit position from a 45 degree angle, and wrap his arms around the ball carrier.
2. On contact, the tackler's head should come across the front of the ball carrier's numbers so the impact is delivered with the shoulder.
3. Check the tackler's technique to make sure the chin and eyes are up, the chest is proud, and the shoulder blades are squeezed back.
4. On the coach's signal, the tackler will slowly drive the ball carrier backwards by taking short, choppy steps. The ball carrier will not resist, allowing himself to be driven back.

**Coaching tips:**

- This drill should be run half speed.
- Upon contact, drive the head in front of the ball carrier's number, across the line of his run, and drive the shoulder upward on the runner at about waist level.
- Sliding the head to the wrong side will result in a weak "arm tackle" that makes it nearly impossible to bring a ball carrier down.
- The tackler should always take an inside out angle on the ball carrier.
- Emphasize that the tackler's head should be across and in front of ball carrier's jersey.



## Angle One Step Fit Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner

**Purpose:** To demonstrate the proper footwork when executing an angle tackle.

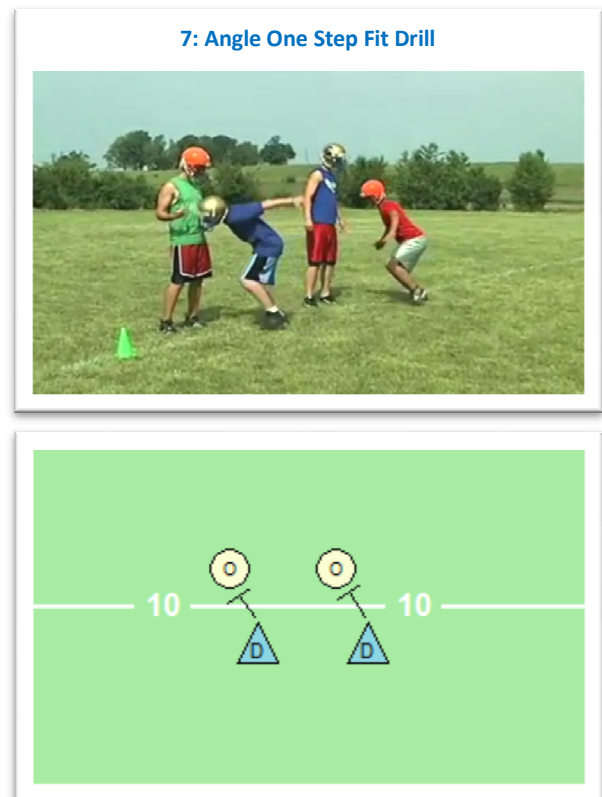
**Set up:** Two players should be facing each other. One player is the tackler the other player is the ball carrier. The tackler should be a step away from the ball carrier, lined up at a 45 degree angle.

**Execution:**

1. The tackler begins in the breakdown position, with the inside foot slightly in front.
2. On the coaches signal, the tackler takes a small downhill power step with the outside foot to make contact with the ball carrier
3. As he steps forward, the tackler's head should slide across the front of the ball carrier's numbers to get his entire body behind the blow.
4. Once contact is made the tackler should club his arms around the ball carrier, grabbing a hold of the jersey and driving the ball carrier back.

**Coaching tips:**

- This is a half speed drill and does not require full contact
- Make sure you practice this drill from both sides, so the tackler gets used to stepping with either foot, and sliding the head to either side on contact
- When a defender is angle tackling to his right, he should drive off the left foot and hit with the left shoulder pad. When a defender is angle tackling to his left, he should drive off the right foot and hit with the right shoulder pad.



## Angle Shuffle and Lift Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner - Intermediate

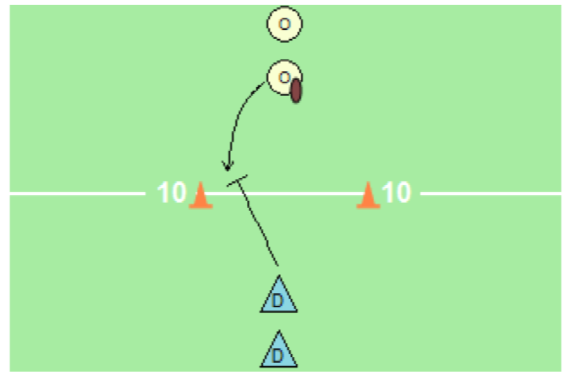
**Purpose:** To demonstrate the proper technique for creating a pursuit angle and finishing with a fundamentally sound angle tackle

**Setup:** Create a line of scrimmage by setting up two cones five yards apart. Place a line of ball carriers five yards behind the line of scrimmage, and a line of tacklers five yards in front of the line of scrimmage.

**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the ball carrier will jog toward the line of scrimmage, choosing the left side or right side.
2. The tackler will create a pursuit angle to meet the ball carrier at the line of scrimmage, and move to intercept him
3. At the moment of contact, the tackler should slide his head in across the ball carrier's numbers, explode from the hips with a rising blow, club his hands around the ball carrier, and lift him up off the ground
4. At the same time, the ball carrier will jump in the air, allowing himself to be picked up by the tackler.
5. The tackler will drive the ball carrier back 5 yards while holding him, then set him down gently

8: Angle Shuffle and Lift Drill



**Coaching Tips**

- This is a half speed drill and does not require full contact
- To start out, the ball carrier should time his jump to minimize the strain on the tackler and make it easier to make the lift
- The tackler should focus on sliding his head across the numbers and avoid arm tackling
- Make sure the ball carriers alternate to the left and right so the tackler can practice angle tackling to both sides

## Eye Opener Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner - Intermediate

**Purpose:** To teach basic position in tackling with a focus on the inside-out pursuit of a ball carrier.

**Set up:** Create a line of scrimmage by setting up four cones approximately three yards apart. This will create three running lanes for your ball carriers to use. Place a line of ball carriers five yards behind the LOS, and a line of tacklers five yards in front of the LOS.

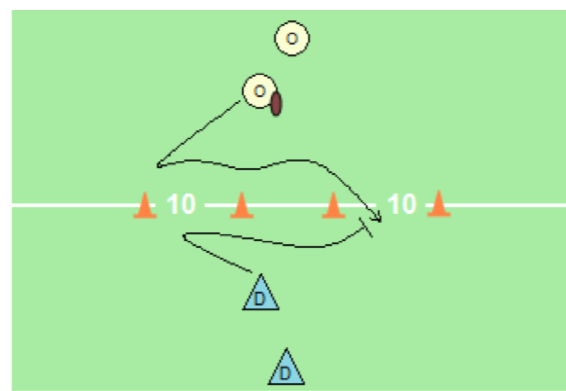
**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the ball carrier approaches the line of scrimmage.
2. He can fake at any of the running lanes before picking one and attempting to cross through it.
3. The tackler will mirror the ball carrier until he attempts to cross the LOS.
4. At that point, the tackler will intercept him by making a fundamentally sound angle tackle.

**Coaching tips:**

- This drill can be run at half speed with helmets only, or as a "live drill" with full pads.
- The tackler is not allowed to cross the LOS until the ball carrier does.
- The tackler should focus on sliding his head across the numbers and avoid arm tackling

9: Eye Opener Drill



## Linebacker Hole Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner - Intermediate

**Purpose:** To demonstrate the proper pursuit angle and against a rapidly approaching ball carrier

**Set up:** Create a line of scrimmage by setting up four cones approximately three yards apart. This will create three running lanes for your ball carriers to use. Place a line of ball carriers five yards behind the LOS, and a line of tacklers five yards in front of the LOS.

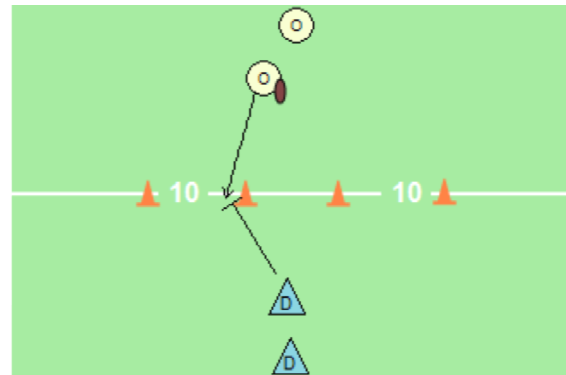
**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the ball carrier picks a lane and sprints towards it
2. The tackler creates a pursuit angle to intercept the ball carrier at the line of scrimmage
3. The tackler meets the ball carrier and executes a fundamentally sound angle tackle.

**Coaching tips:**

- This drill can be run at half speed with helmets only, or as a "live drill" with full pads.
- To start out, you can run this drill with only three cones and two rushing lanes with younger players. As they get more comfortable with the drill, you can add in additional rushing lanes
- The tackler is not allowed to cross the LOS until the ball carrier does.
- The tackler should focus on sliding his head across the numbers and avoid arm tackling

10: Linebacker Hole Drill



## Angle Cutback Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner - Intermediate

**Purpose:** To help train your defensive players to react to the ball carrier and use the proper footwork to adjust their pursuit angle.

**Set up:** Create a line of scrimmage by setting up four cones approximately three yards apart. This will create three running lanes for your ball carriers to use. Place a line of ball carriers five yards behind the line of scrimmage, and a line of tacklers five yards in front of the line of scrimmage.

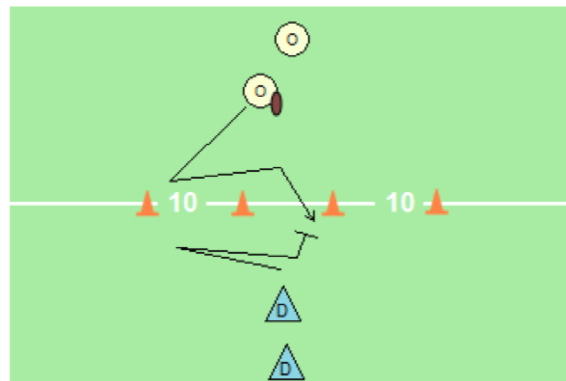
**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the ball carrier picks a lane and sprints towards it. At his discretion he can sharply cut back and choose another lane.
2. The tackler creates a pursuit angle to intercept the ball carrier at the line of scrimmage. On the cutback, he adjusts his pursuit angle
3. The tackler meets the ball carrier and executes a fundamentally sound open field tackle.

**Coaching tips:**

- This drill can be run at half speed with helmets only, or as a "live drill" with full pads.
- The tackler should focus on sliding his head across the numbers and avoid arm tackling
- The tackler should have a good knee bend and explode from the waist, wrapping his arms around the ball carrier to bring him down.

11: Angle Cut Back Drill



## Open Field Cutback Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner - Intermediate

**Purpose:** To help your tacklers create the proper pursuit angle in the open field, and react quickly to a change of direction by the ball carrier

**Setup:** Place two sets of two cones, about 20 yards apart, with a line of ball carrier and a line of tacklers facing each other.

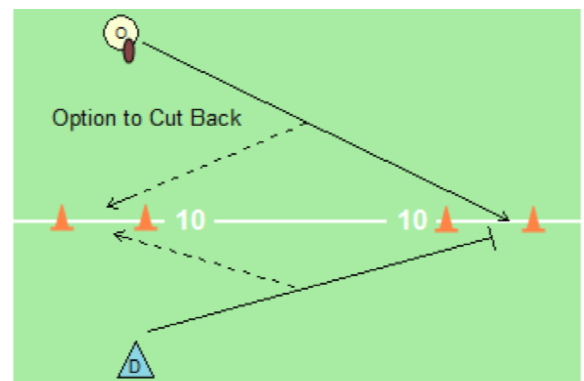
**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the ball carrier will sprint to the set of cones on the outside
2. He can choose to run all the way through the outside cones, or cut back and run through the inside cones
3. The tackler will pursue the ball carrier, react to the cutback and finish with an open field tackle.

**Coaching Tips:**

- This drill can be run at half speed with helmets only, or as a "live drill" with full pads.
- In an open field tackling situation, make sure the tackler approaches the ball carrier under control and avoids over-pursuing.
- Avoid lunging or diving. Stay patient, make certain where the ball carrier is going, then commit to a line of pursuit that will force him out of bounds or slow him down until help arrives.
- The tackler should focus on sliding his head across the numbers and avoid arm tackling
- This drill can be run with all defensive positions, but is especially important for defensive backs

11: Open Field Cut Back Drill



## Swing Tackle Drill

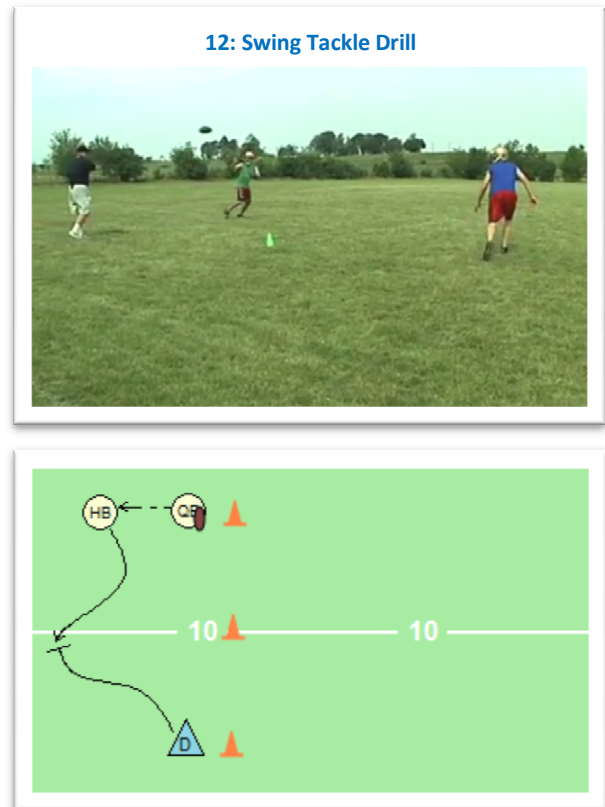
**Difficulty:** Beginner - Intermediate

**Purpose:** To demonstrate the proper technique for tackling in space, especially against a sweep, flare pass or swing pass.

**Set up:** Set up a quarterback or coach in shotgun position, with a halfback standing around three yards to his side. The tackler will be positioned 5 yards deep across the line of scrimmage.

**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the quarterback will throw a flare pass to the half back
2. The halfback will break towards the line of scrimmage and try to beat the tackler
3. The tackler will pursue the halfback and intercept him, making a fundamentally sound open field tackle
4. When making contact the tackler's head should be up and across the ball carrier's numbers. The tackler will wrap his arms around the ball carrier driving him out of bounds or pulling him to the ground.



**Coaching tips:**

- This drill can be run at half speed with helmets only, or as a "live drill" with full pads.
- Consider marking a "live" area with cones to restrict the halfback's movement and make it easier for the tackler to track him down
- When a defender is facing a ball carrier in an open field situation, he should take a conservative approach. Don't worry about driving through the ball carrier or delivering a hard blow.
- Focus on getting a hold of the player and preventing him from scoring. If possible, use the sideline to pen the ball carrier in to one side of the field.
- Make sure to work this drill on both sides of the field. The half back should also vary his direction and moves to show the tackler different looks.
- Tell your tacklers to watch the hips and belt buckle to guess the ball carrier's intended direction

## Sideline Tackle Drill

---

**Difficulty:** Beginner - Intermediate

**Purpose:** To demonstrate how to use the sideline as an extra defender and execute a fundamentally sound sideline tackle.

**Set up:** Set up a line of scrimmage along the sideline using cones. The ball carrier stands five yards behind the LOS. The tackler stands five yards in front of the LOS

**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the ball carrier sprints to the sideline and tries to beat the tackler
2. The tackler moves to intercept the ball carrier and tackle him or force him out of bounds

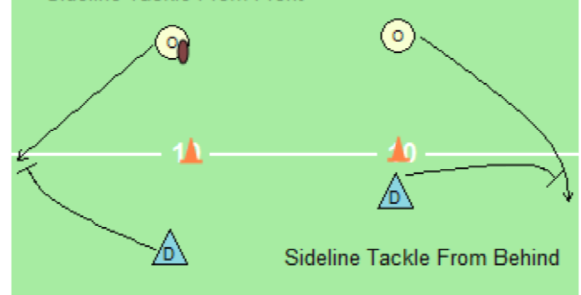
**Coaching Tips:**

- This drill can be run at half speed with helmets only, or as a "live drill" with full pads.
- Make sure the tackler maintains an inside out relationship with the ball carrier, forcing him to take the sideline instead of cutting back to the middle
- With larger backs, tacklers can focus on running the ball carrier out of bounds if they are unable to tackle him in space
- As a variation, start the tackler at the line of scrimmage so the ball carrier beats him to the sideline and he is forced to make a tackle from behind.
- In this scenario, the tackler should attempt to punch the ball free with his outside arm as he wraps the ball carrier up and drags him out of bounds

13: Sideline Tackle Drill



Sideline Tackle From Front



## Key Reaction and Tackle Drill

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Purpose:** To help a defender learn how to read the offensive lineman's block, then either pursue the ball carrier or drop back into coverage

**Setup:** Place a quarterback five yards behind the line of scrimmage, and an offensive lineman at the LOS. The defender stands five yards in front of the LOS in breakdown position.

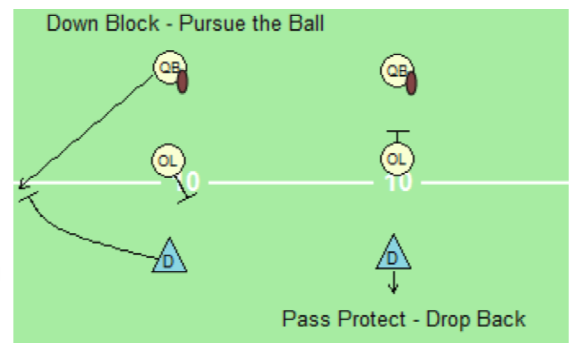
**Execution:**

1. On the coaches signal, the offensive lineman will either down block on a 45 degree angle or step back into a pass protection set
2. If the lineman down blocks, the tackler will know it is a running play and move to intercept the ball carrier and make the tackle.
3. If the lineman pass protects, the tackler will drop back five yards into coverage.

**Coaching tips:**

- This is a half speed drill that is designed to help the defender read keys. Full contact is not necessary.
- Reinforce proper tackling fundamentals, with the head up, back straight, knees bent, and feet shoulder width apart
- The defender should focus on the ball carrier's belt buckle to determine his direction and set up the correct pursuit angle
- This is an especially good drill for defensive backs, but is also useful for linebackers and defensive linemen

14: Key Reaction and Tackle Drill



## Shed and Tackle Drill

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**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Purpose:** To teach defenders how to get off blocks and make a fundamentally sound angle tackle

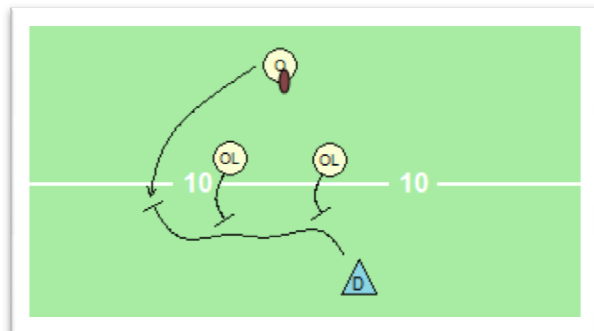
**Setup:** Put two blockers at the of scrimmage. The ball carrier stands five yards behind the blockers, and the defender stands five yards in front of the blockers, positioned to their inside.

**Execution:**

1. Place a ball carrier five yards behind the LOS with two up front. The defender sets up five yards in front of the LOS, inside the blockers.
2. On the coaches signal, the ball carrier runs to the inside of the cone.
3. The defender pursues the ball carrier to intercept him at the cone.
4. The blockers each attempt to block the defender, one at a time, allowing him to get past after making contact

**Coaching Tips:**

- This drill can be run at half speed with helmets only, or as a "live drill" with full pads.
- Continue to reinforce the proper tackling fundamentals. Finish the tackle by grasping the runner behind his legs and lifting him off the ground, keeping the feet moving with short, choppy steps.
- On contact with the blockers, both players should keep their head and eyes up. Use only token contact to start, and as your players become more comfortable, the blockers can be more aggressive and force the defender to beat them with a rip move or bull rush.



## More Tackling Drills

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Thanks for checking out this report!

If you're looking for more advanced tackling drills, make sure you check out the [Total Defensive Skills & Drills](#) online video clinic package.

It's jam-packed with 79 all-new practice drills for your d-linemen, linebackers and defensive backs, all explained with step by step instructions and video demonstrations.

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