



Coach Technique and Drill Manual

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Tackling Technique

Teaching proper tackling technique promotes player safety and encourages all players to actively engage in football.

In this section, we will review the simple step by step progression you will use to teach tackling fundamentals to all LTFL 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.



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.**

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.

On the following pages are basic tackling drills designed which are mandatory. 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 manual 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.



Developmental Tackling Drills

One Step Fit Drill

Difficulty: Beginner

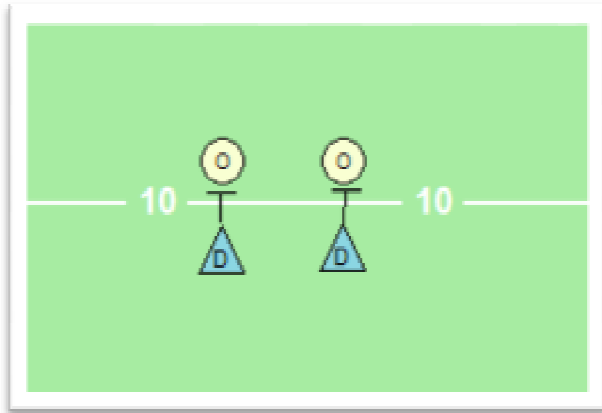
Purpose: A slow motion demonstration of the proper footwork for executing a head-on tackle. Set up: The tackler should be a step away from the ball carrier. Two players should be facing each other. One player is the tackler the other player is the ball carrier.

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 players 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.



4 Point Explosion Drill

Difficulty: Beginner

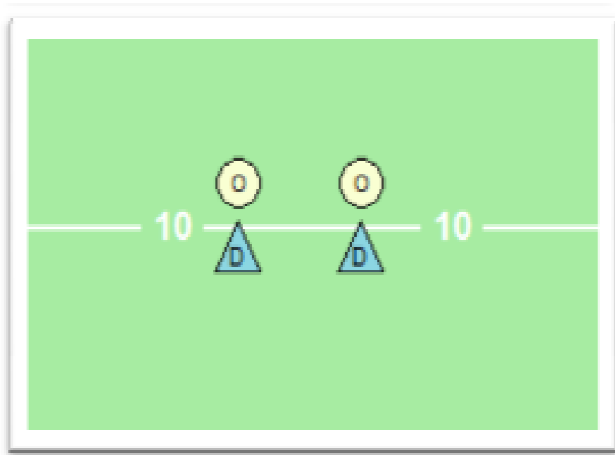
Purpose: To teach the proper hip roll when making contact. This drill is useful for taking on blocks, shedding blocks and making tackles - all essential skills for any defensive player. Setup: The tackler and ball carrier both are on their knees facing each other.

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 coach's 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.



Inline Tackling Drill

Difficulty: Beginner-Intermediate

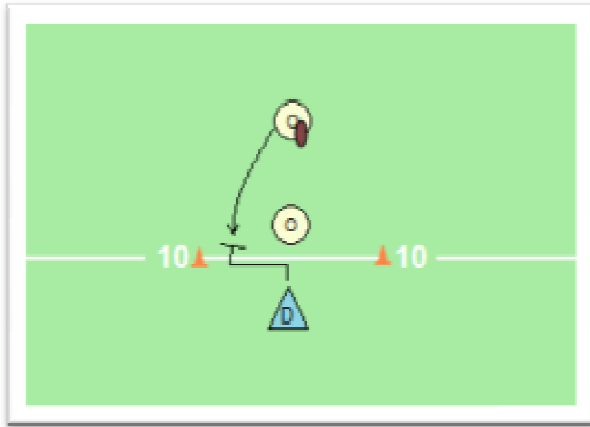
Purpose: A half speed, game-like drill that simulates shedding a block, creating a pursuit angle and stopping a ball carrier at the line of scrimmage. **Setup:** Set up a line of scrimmage by placing two cones five yards apart. Place a blocker between the two cones, on his knees. The ball carrier stands five yards behind the line of scrimmage. The tackler lines up opposite the blocker.

Execution:

1. On the coach's 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 One Step Fit Drill

Difficulty: Beginner

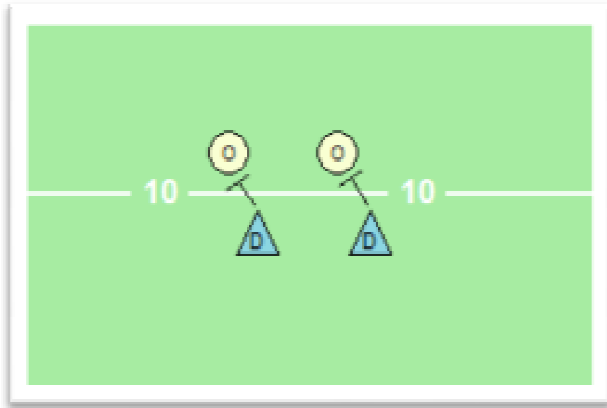
Purpose: To demonstrate the proper footwork when executing an angle tackle. Set up: Two players should be facing each other. One player is the tackler the other player is the ball carrier. The tackler should be a step away from the ball carrier, lined up at a 45 degree angle.

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.

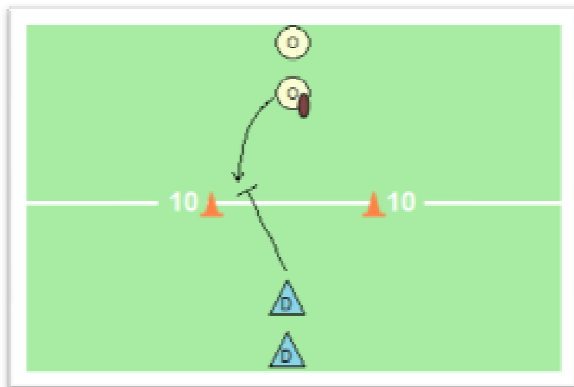
Execution:

1. On the coach's 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

Coaching Tips

- This is a half speed drill and does not require full contact
- Works well with blocking/tackling dummies (AS PICTURED)
- 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



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.

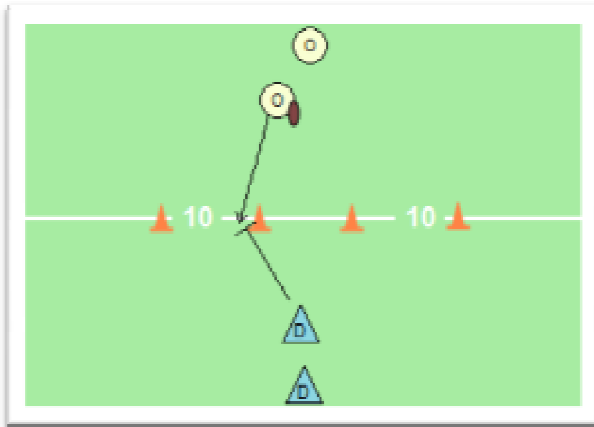
Execution:

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



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.

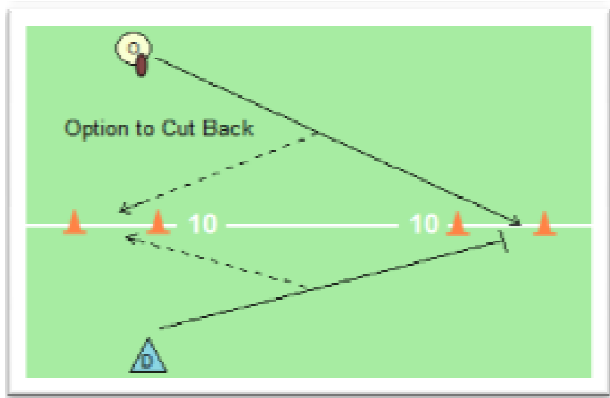
Execution:

1. On the coach's 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



Sideline Tackle Drill

Difficulty: Beginner - Intermediate

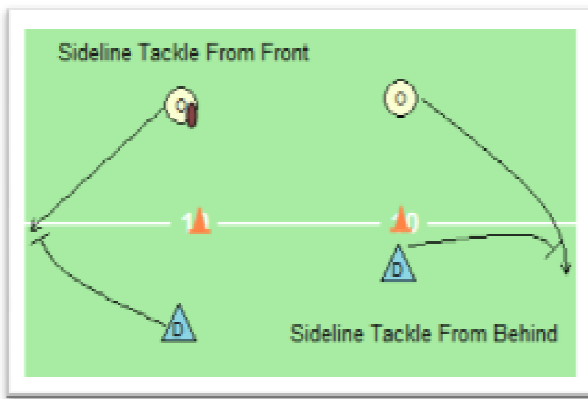
Purpose: To demonstrate how to use the sideline as an extra defender and execute a fundamentally sound sideline tackle. Set up: Set up a line of scrimmage along the sideline using cones. The ball carrier stands five yards behind the LOS. The tackler stands five yards in front of the LOS

Execution:

1. On the coach's 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



Every LTFL player regardless of athletic ability can benefit from proper repetitious technique and agility drills. These drills build muscle memory, build confidence, enhance stamina and will make your players better.

OFFENSE

Offensive Stance and Starts

Difficulty Level: Beginner.

Setup: You'll need four cones, and three lines of players. Proper stance is absolutely critical no matter the offensive position. Start everyone with proper three point stance technique demonstrating how to explode from through the fit position. You can later separated by position; running backs, wide receivers and the offensive line.

Purpose: To evaluate and/or correct each players stance, as well as to eliminate any unnecessary steps as they come forward out of it.

Execution: With the players set up in three lines, go through your regular offensive cadence. When you say set, they should immediately get into stance, When you say set, they should immediately get into stance, upon the call, they should explode forward past the cones in front of them, turnaround, and get ready to do the drill again. You'll also want to add another aspect to the drill, instructing players with which foot they take their first step with. Often times when players have to step forward with a foot they aren't comfortable with, they'll do what we call a false step, taking a step back to set their feet, then moving forward. By doing so they not only slow themselves down, but leave themselves unbalanced and easily dealt with by a defender.

Coaching Tips: Remind players to just keep their weight forward, and to just let their natural momentum carry them forwards and they should find it easier to deal with. This is also not a drill that you do at the beginning of practice and then forget about – you need to be vigilant the entire practice, making sure to correct any sloppy stances or footwork on sight.

Hand Off Fundamentals

Difficulty Level: Beginner.

Setup: You'll need two cones, one football, and to separate your players into two groups, one at each cone, facing each other.

Purpose: To develop the correct technique for receiving handoffs.

Execution: Have each group lineup on the left side of the cone. The player at the front of the line with the football will start to walk across to the other line, with the football clamped down tight. Once he nears his teammate, he will take the ball out of the pocket, and handoff to his teammate. It is important to walkthrough the first couple times you run a drill. Letting the players run loose immediately will cause them to ignore the fundamentals, and will hurt them in the long run.



Coaching Tips: If your players are unfamiliar with how to take a handoff properly, there are a couple things for

them to keep in mind when forming the pocket. First, they'll want to put their hand straight out and forward, as if they're reaching for a high five. Next they want to spread their fingers wide, and rotate their hand so that their thumb is planted square in their chest. Their elbow should be up at shoulder level, providing a nice big target for the quarterback. Next, he'll extend his other arm, palm up, at roughly waist level separating his fingers, and rotate his arm, bringing his pinky into his stomach, and point the thumb out and down, with his palm still up in the air. By forcing that thumb down he'll lock his elbow in, creating a great big pocket area for the quarterback to place the ball. The last step is simple – just clamp down with both arms securing the football!

Agility Circuit

Difficulty Level: Beginner.

Setup: Whatever kind of marker works best for you will do – I personally just stick with cones. Set them up so that the course is bookended by larger gaps. This way we can encourage players to explode out at the end of each run, a technique that is especially important for your running backs and receivers to learn.

Purpose: To improve your players agility, running technique, and coordination.

Execution: Have each player weave through the cones, with the player next in line waiting until their teammate has gotten past the fourth cone to run. As soon as a player has run the course, they should get in line, ready to go back the other way as soon as everyone has gone through once. Our next step is to separate the cones by a couple of yards, creating some strong Vs for the players to run through. The key here is for them to get low and sink their hips when they pass the cone, plant with their outside foot, and explode forward to the next cone. Coaching Tips: Great thing about this drill is that it is beneficial to every single player on your team. The agility is important, but even just developing the correct running technique – the arms are pumping, the knees as well, and their head is right over their knees. It can also be a great help to place this drill directly on a line. The younger players especially, who's motor skills are just developing will see huge gains in coordination

Building Block Drill

Difficulty Level: Beginner.

Setup: All you'll need for this drill is two players and a blocking pad.

Purpose: To teach the fundamentals of any block on the numbers your offensive line will need to do.

Execution: There is a three part breakdown to this drill. They are '**fit**', '**hit**', and '**drive**'. To start, the players should be about a yard and a half apart with the offensive player in a relaxed standing position and the defender holding the blocking pad, ready for impact. The player freezing after initiating the ready for impact. When you call out fit, the offensive player will get into a low, strong, athletic position, with their hands up close to their chest, ready to pop. Next, when you call out hit, they will make contact, delivering the blow and establishing the hands inside. After the hit, the player should freeze, to allow you to evaluate them. The last part of the drill is drive. Here the player will drive his opponent back, taking three small steps.

Coaching Tips: To get the whole team involved, have the players lineup parallel to each other and after each command take the time to walk up and down the line to check balance, arm position, and anything else you might need to correct.



DEFENSE

Defensive Stance and Starts

Difficulty Level: Beginner.

Setup: Four cones, used to create a rectangle about 10 yards wide and 5 yards deep. Your players will form four lines on the long side of the rectangle, separated by position – defensive linemen, defensive ends, linebackers, and defensive backs.

Purpose: Teaching the proper stance, and ensuring players are balanced and able to come out of it explosively in any direction.

Execution: Once the players are in stance take time to correct any mistakes. Then stand or crouch across from them on the other side of the rectangle, and hike the ball off the ground. The players will all explode out of their stances upon the ball's movement slowing down to a stop once they've crossed the rectangle, and returning to the back of their respective lines. When they're comfortable with that, we'll add a second aspect to the drill. Instead of just hiking the ball, hold it out to the left or right upon the snap. The players will then move in the corresponding direction, adjusting accordingly as you move the ball left, right, and lastly pointing it behind you, signaling them to explode past you.

Coaching Tips: Don't underestimate the importance of a strong stance. Every player at every position needs to understand that proper stance encourages ready results. It makes for a good warmup, and drills in the importance of getting a great first step. You also want to keep in mind that every position is going to have a slightly different stance – your defensive backs aren't going to be playing out of a three point stance in games, so there's no point in having them do so in practice. This is why we separate the lines by position.

W Drill

Difficulty Level: Beginner.

Setup: Five cones, used to create a 'W', with each cone roughly 5-7 yards apart from the next. The players will line up at one end of the 'W', with the first player facing everyone else in the line.

Purpose: To improve the players ability to backpedal at a 45 degree angle, then change direction and explode forwards promoting agility while emphasizing play awareness and vision.

Execution: The first player in line will begin the drill by backpedaling at a 45 degree angle until they pass the first cone, at which point they will change directions, running forward to the next cone. They will continue this pattern until they complete the 'W'. For the first couple times through, start off slowly – even have them walk through it. From there work up to about 75%, and eventually 100% once the players are all completely comfortable.

Coaching Tips: The technique is fairly simple; the player should have their knees just slightly in front of their toes, sink their behind, and pump their arms with every step. Every player is going to go about it a little bit differently, and that's fine - as long as they're able to move backwards efficiently and balanced, and able to

change directions with ease. Most players first instinct is to turn back and look to see where they're going. But even a quick look back will cause them to lose track of the ball, because on defense, everything will be happening in front of them.



Shed and Tackle

Difficulty Level: Intermediate.

Setup: You'll need five total players and three cones, as well as three blocking pads and a football. Purpose: To combine three separate skills into one drill – shedding a block, getting out into open space, and making the tackle.

Execution: Three of the players will line up as the center, guard, and tackle of one side of an offensive line, with each holding a blocking pad. There will be a cone just outside the foot of the tackle, with another about 3-5 yards further down the same line. The third and final cone will be just a couple of yards deeper than the widest cone, and the ball carrier will stand 5-7 yards directly behind the center. Your defender, the player running through the drill, will line up directly in front of the center. The defensive player is going to explode out of his stance, and pop each bag, shedding sideways as he does so. When the ball carrier sees the defender shed the guard's block, he will begin running, following the line of the two cones set up in the backfield. Once the defender has shed the third block, he'll shuffle over to the wide cone in stance, and then wrap up the ball carrier as he comes through the hole.

Coaching Tips: Make sure the defender is really popping the o-line and not just going through the motions. A strong pop will move the o-lineman onto his heels, allowing the defender to slide over and disengage from the block. Also, the defender shouldn't be looking to just lay the boom on the ball carrier as he comes up through the hole – this is a form tackling drill, where the focus is on wrapping up the defender with both arms and taking him down.



Practice Organization

Your practices should be built into three blocks with two of the three blocks focused on technique and fundamental execution utilizing the drills and their variations listed in this manual.

Practice Block	Approx Time	Coaching Notes
WARM UP	10 MINS	Agility
FUNDAMENTALS	30 MINS	Tackling and blocking fundamentals
WATER BREAK	5 MINS	
OFFENSE/DEFENSE DRILLS	30 MINS	Individual / group
WATER BREAK	5 MINS	
GROUP PERIOD	30 MINS	
COOL DOWN	10 MINS	

Coaching Tips:

Keep player down time to a minimum. Players should be actively engaged as much as possible without neglecting attention to detail.

Be quick on the whistle. Also, do not use whistles to start drills or plays... only to end them. Focus on using ball movement to initiate defensive movements and calls to start offensive exercises.

Keep full speed contact to a minimum. Focus on proper technique at slower speeds, at angles and in tight spaces.

Technique and repetition is the absolute key to creating better players and keeping the game safe!

