

Assessment Task #10

The expanding role of the tackler.....an
EXPANSION IN FOCUS

The discussion in this paper will be around the expanding role of the tackler, their POST tackle action, and the influence it can have on the game. The times of players simply making an effective tackle and thinking their contribution to your team is finished...are OVER!!

I would like to say that I strongly feel the 1 on 1 tackle is still the most critical component of the game (when talking of defence) and it is crucial this is executed 1st and foremost in setting up the 2nd action process.

The options available to the tackler are slightly different dependant on the tackle executed.

Different tackle technique requiring different 2nd effort actions are

- Low tackle front on (below the hips)
- Low tackle from the side (attacker has either advanced inside or outside of the defenders initial position)
- Low chasing tackle from behind
- Mid Front on tackle (dominant = dominated by tackler)
- Mid Front on tackle (passive = dominated by ball carrier)
- High Front on tackle (dominant = dominated by tackler)
- High Front on tackle (passive = dominated by ball carrier)
- High chasing tackle from behind

I believe that the role of the tackler (from a coaching perspective) has previously only been limited to the process of making the tackle and rolling away (LAW 15.4). This is aligned with the insistence of the referee to encourage the free flowing nature of the game and ensure that the tackled player has the opportunity to promote the ball (in any direction), without hindrance from the tackler illegally or a player to move the ball away from the ruck and the game flow.

I am focusing on the LEGAL options available to the tackler in this scenario.

For the tackler to have any involvement in the defensive breakdown it is important to note that they need to be on their FEET and have already clearly RELEASED the attacking player they have tackled (Law 15.4 a,b,c). These 2 caveats are assumed to have been executed when I highlight the options below.

It is critical initially to look at the tackle itself and how the different tackle scenarios allow a tackler to initiate a 2nd effort to impact the breakdown.

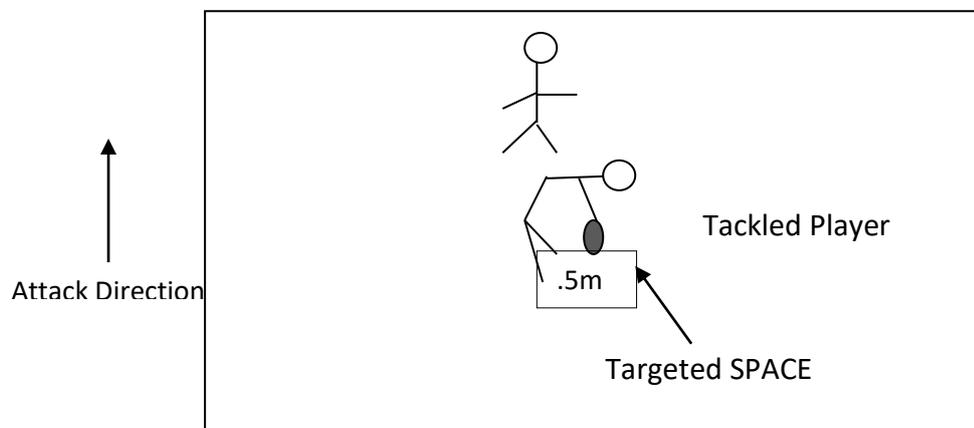
The defending player may be bound to what the team's defensive policy may be towards a particular team, an identified opponent within that team, or a general coaching philosophy. This then shapes behaviour around the tackler and their 2nd action.

I will be discussing 3 options the player has. They are:

1. Roll away.

2. Target the BALL

3. Target the SPACE (.5m on the positive side of the ball)



1. ROLL AWAY

When the player rolls away it must be immediately after they have finished the tackle. The player after rolling away should (does not always happen as players can be lazy and lie on the ground for seconds) RE-LOAD back to his feet and has a number of options:

- Counter ruck from an onside position: once this player has rolled away and returned to the off side line they can then try to drive an opposition player in the ruck backwards to try and expose the ball on their side. The initiation to achieve this must be “through the gate”
- Place himself as the 1st defender either on the fold side or the return side awaiting a Pick and Go scenario to defend or attack the ½ back when he is in the motion of passing....NOT when he has his hands on the ball extracting it from a ruck.
- Return to the edge of a defensive line (usually a back returning to a blind edge)
- Return to their defensive key position in behind the line (usually a 9 in the boot/pocket/guard)

2. TARGET THE BALL

A player's position regarding targeting the ball will be made in reference to the tackle scenarios identified above:

- **Low tackle front on (below the hips)** – with the ball carrier travelling over the defender the tackler gets to his feet immediately attacks the BALL. If the attacker fails to release a penalty is earned (Law 15.5.e). A low centre of gravity is important to “survive” the clean out from the arriving attackers. The defender does not need to release the BALL if he is in contact with an arriving attacker.
- **Low tackle from the side (attacker has either advanced inside or outside of the defenders initial position)** – this scenario requires the defender to swing his hips around assisting him to get to his feet and again can target the ball from any direction as long as he does this prior to the arrival of the 1st attacking player joining the breakdown.
- **Low chasing tackle from behind** – here the attacker has a significant advantage however a tackler may attack the ball from any direction and anchor down on the BALL attempting to win a turnover/penalty.
- **Mid Front on tackle (dominant: dominated by tackler) / High Front on tackle (dominant: dominated by tackler)** – these scenarios will see the ball carrier more than likely on their back or in a poor position to present the ball. It's more difficult for this player to target the ball as they may be past it and need to retreat to gain access. In saying this, if they can prior to any opposition arriving, they have ALL rights to the BALL.
- **Mid Front on tackle (passive: dominated by ball carrier) / High Front on tackle (passive: dominated by ball carrier)** – with these tackle techniques supporting players for the attack will be engaged at the tackle before the ball goes to ground. In these cases, access to the BALL must be through the ruck from an onside position (defenders last feet)
- **High chasing tackle from behind** – here it is critical the defender goes to ground WITH the attacking player to ensure a tackle has been made. Then they may get back to their feet and have access from any direction (if they are 1st). If the defender simply throws the attacker to the ground the access to the ball can only be from an onside position, NOT any.

3. TARGET THE SPACE

If the team/player has a focus of targeting the SPACE past the ball, they still need to ensure they are following the process above identified for each of the tackle scenarios, HOWEVER, this time the BALL is ignored and the player simply occupies the SPACE past the ball.

Law 15.7 d is applicable in these circumstances however the definition is grey and teams acting immediately are “counter rucking”

The tackler is the 1st to initiate this action and the secondary arriving players (defensively) can either pick up the ball if it is available (as the ball carrier must release when they are off their feet), or they may choose to also take the SPACE past the ball and remove any arriving attackers who are trying to recycle possession. This could then be repeated by another arriving defender and a turnover achieved.

It is important to note that these players must enter through the appropriate gate and remain on their feet. It is recommended if they can to bind together as one entity. This makes it very difficult for the attacking team to stop.

A general policy may be adopted by the team when it comes to this focus. I recommend utilising it in the following scenarios:

1. Isolated ball carrier (wide 15m channels with limited inside support available)
2. Contestable Kick Receipt (kick by now defending team)
3. Counter attacking player that is caught behind his support and is isolated.
4. Bigger focus in attacking ½ of the field

PROBLEMS

It is critical that players are focused on the same concept and react to the motion/action of the tackler. They initiate the action and problems arise where players are focused on differing things.

A tackler getting back to his feet and targeting the BALL will be hindered by an arriving team mate who is focusing on the SPACE past the ball (effectively knocking his own player off his feet over the ball= penalty).

Conversely a tackler re-loading and targeting the SPACE won't be as effective and achieve the turnover if his next arriving player targets the BALL. The opportunity is lost and the attacking team retains possession.

A unified focus is ultimately going to provide more opportunities to turn the ball over and allow the team to adopt an attacking focus with the tacklers post tackle action and arriving players' benefit to the team.

Conclusion

The role of the tackler in the game is becoming more and more important.

Not for the tackle they make, but what they are doing immediately after. Having the ability to 1. Roll away and assume a number of positions in the defensive line, 2. Target the BALL, and 3. Target the SPACE, provides individuals and coaches opportunities to refine and strategise on how to out play an opposing team.

It highlights the competitive opportunities in the game and it is a real skill to be able to execute these techniques to be effective. It also provides coaches with ways to try and get the ball back to play with.

I feel this component of the game will continue to develop and end up being a defining aspect of winning teams into the future.

Much is made of the role and responsibility of the 1st arriving player from both the attack and the defensive teams. I feel the 1st arriving player to the tackle is the tackler himself (once he has returned to his feet and released the ball carrier).

The 1st arriving player from the attacking team has to beat the tackler getting back to his feet to limit their options. This RACE is one of the keys to our game and will continue to be so.