NCCP SAFE CONTACT

TEACHING MODERN TACKLING TECHNIQUES

By: Tom Annett

annettt@email.adsb.on.ca

Football Canada
Coaches Association des entraîneurs

SAULT SABERCATS Football Club

PRESENTATION VIDEO

Whenever you see this icon: **click on it to get linked to YouTube video footage**

SAULT SABERCATS Football Club

NCCP SAFE CONTACT

TEACHING MODERN TACKLING TECHNIQUES

PART 1 of 2

HIT UP FUNDAMENTALS

Football Canada

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- **Bill & Kyle Williams** *(FCPGA)*
- **Chris Ash** *(U of Wisconsin)*
- **Chuck Clemens** *(U of Central Missouri)*
- **Rick Ponx** *(North Central College)*
- **Football Canada** *(NCCP Safe Contact)*

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- **Bobby Hosea (TEUA)**

- **Hugh Wyatt**

- **USA Football**

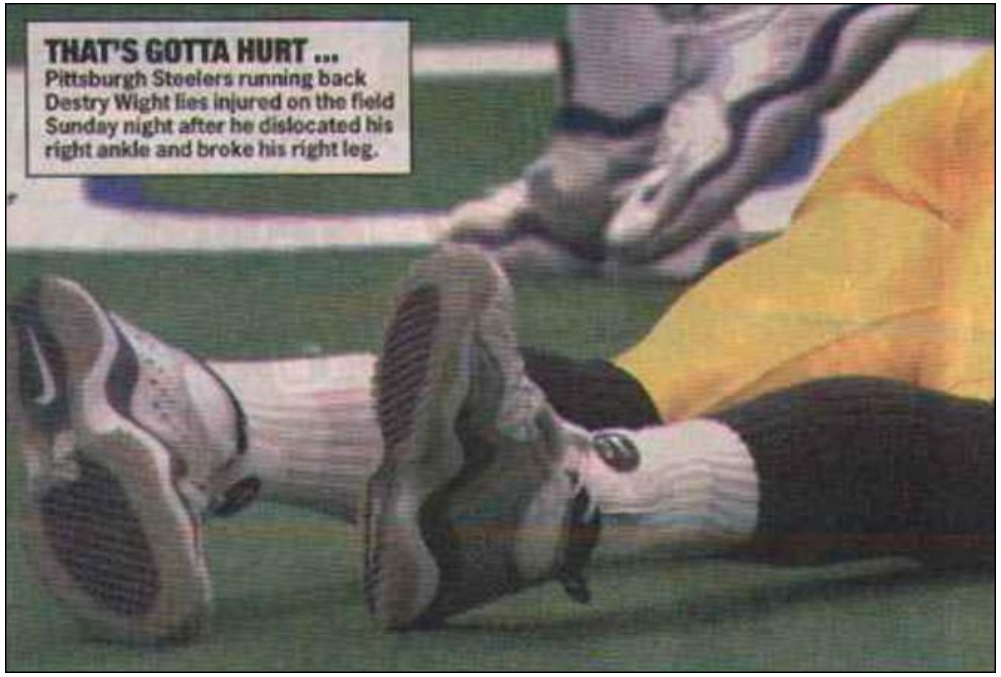
SAFE CONTACT

- **Football is a violent game with inherent health risks**
- **Impossible to make football 100% safe**
- **Our job as coaches is to minimize the risks**
  - *Coach and drill safe tackling technique*
  - *Use proper drill progressions (age / skill level appropriate)*
  - *Control amount of contact in practices*
  - *Strength & conditioning (neck)*
  - *Control speed & intensity level of contact in practices*
  - *Put players in safe equipment*

HEALTH & SAFETY AWARENESS

- **Spinal injuries**
  - 1968 → 30 football players paralysed

- **Concussions**
  - *Can't see a concussion*
  - *Coaches won't tell this guy to "suck it up"*



"If only we could bleed profusely from our nose and ears when we get a concussion"

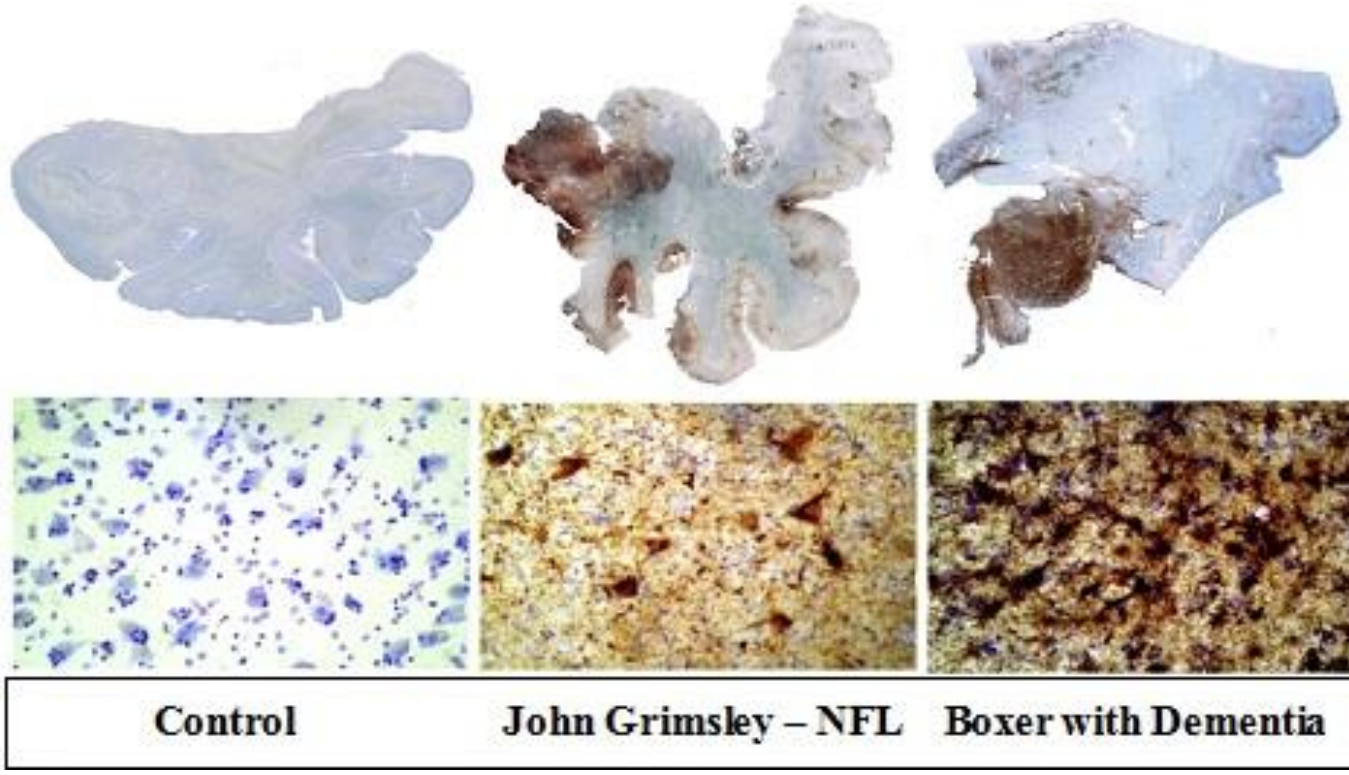
Christopher Nowinski

Christopher Nowinski: The Impact of Concussions in Youth and College Sports

HEALTH & SAFETY AWARENESS

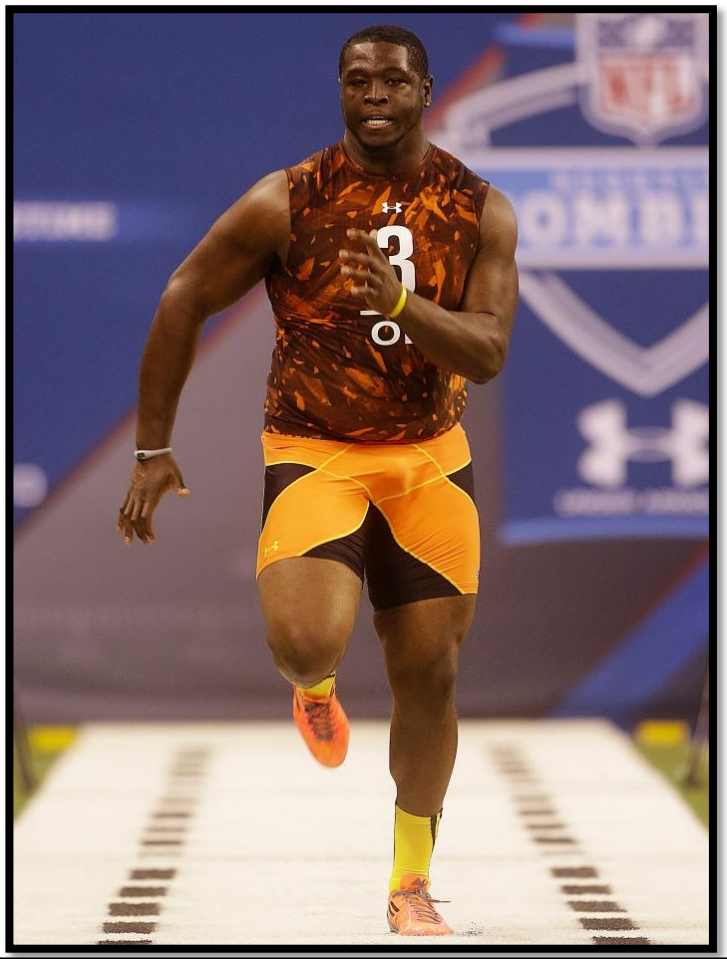
- **Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE)**
  - *Can lead to: bursts of anger, depression, memory loss, difficulty walking & speaking, paranoia, suicide*

- New research → cumulative effect of sub-concussive hits can lead to CTE.



Increased size, speed & strength of modern athletes

Terron Armstead, 6’5, 306 pounds, 4.71 Forty



JJ Watt, 6’5, 290 pounds, 37 inch Vertical

HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD?

- Must show parents that we are working to make football safer or the game will die.
- Acknowledge the risks & address the concerns
- ***Young people need football now more than ever!***

BAN COLLEGE FOOTBALL?

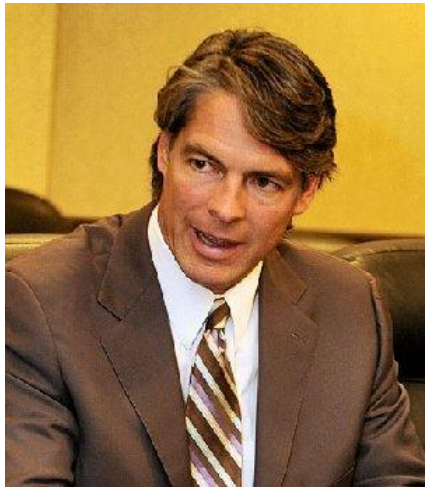
intelligence² DEBATES

Buzz Bissinger

Malcolm Gladwell

VS

Tim Green



Jason Whitlock

SHOULD WE BAN COLLEGE FOOTBALL?	PRE-DEBATE RESULTS	POST DEBATE RESULTS
YES - BAN COLLEGE FOOTBALL	16%	53%
NO - DO NOT BAN COLLEGE FOOTBALL	53%	39%
UNDECIDED	31%	8%

HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD?

1. **Coach safe football techniques that take the head out of contact**

2. **Reduce the amount of live contact in practices**

3. **New rules to deter head shots**

4. **Improved equipment**
   - *Tracking head shots / Hit Counts*

HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD?

- **Imperative that we teach safe tackling, especially at the youth level.**
  - *Young brains are still developing and are more sensitive to concussions*
  - *Enough qualified youth coaches?*
  - *Bad habits can be developed at the youth level.*

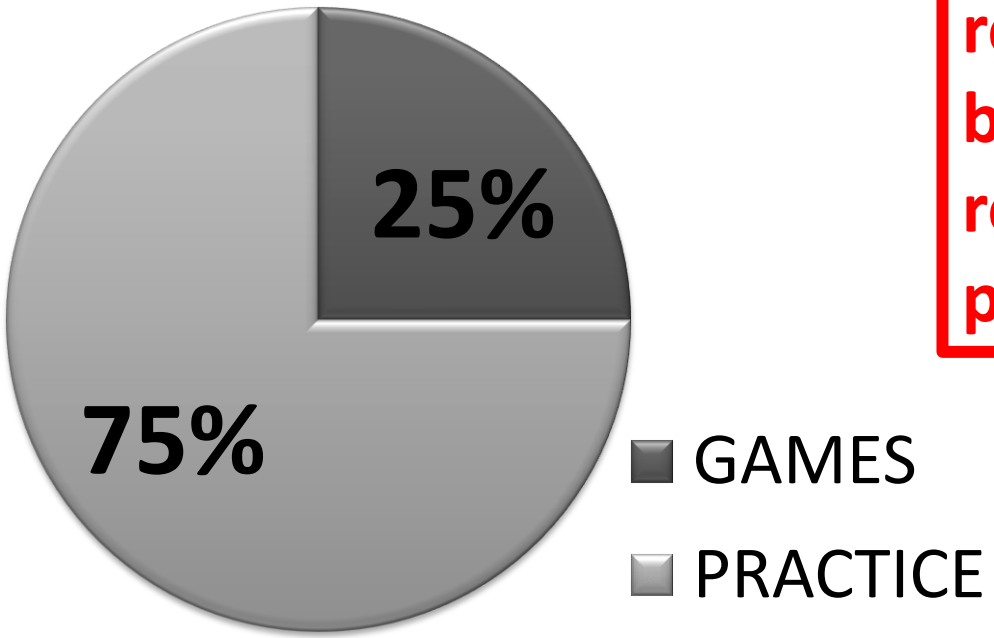
Football Canada

HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD?

➢ Reduce Contact in Practices

MEASUREMENT OF HEAD IMPACTS IN COLLEGIATE FOOTBALL PLAYERS:
MIHALIK ET AL NEUROSURGERY – VOLUME 61 – NUMBER 6 – DECEMBER 2007

HEAD TRAUMA



KEY TAKEAWAY: We can reduce total brain trauma by >50% tomorrow if we restricted hitting in practice

TACKLING PARADOX

To be a great tackling team, you must drill tackling every day

vs.

Must reduce live contact in practice for player health & safety

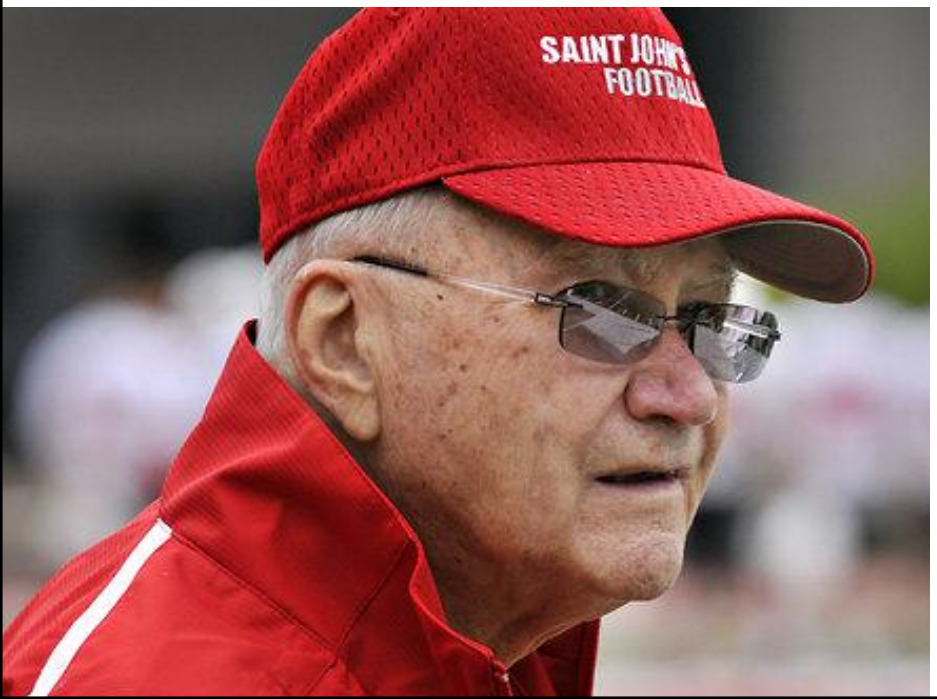
- *Can tackling be effectively taught with minimal live contact?→* ***YES IT CAN!***

JOHN GAGLIARDI - Saint John's University

Most wins in college football history

*(1949-2009): **471**-126-11*

- *4 National titles, 30 Conference Championships*
- ***Does not* allow tackling in practice**



"They thought I was nuts! … The only thing that saved me is that we were winning."

"The only drawback of coaching is seeing people hurt."

Tackling Technique & Drill Work Must Evolve with the Game

- **Adapt to Modern Offenses**
  - *More spread offenses = more open field tackles*
- **Canadian Game vs. American Game**
  - *Larger field, more passing, more special teams play*
- **Must Practice '*Situational*' Tackles**
  - *Addressed in part 2 of the presentation*

Why Do Some Teams Struggle with Tackling?

1) **Coaches assume their players know how to tackle.**

2) **Failure to recognize tackling proficiency**
   - ***Glorify big hit without grabbing cloth***

3) **Coaches lack knowledge / experience to effectively coach tackling**
   - *"80% desire, 20% technique"?*
   - ***Attention to detail***
   - ***Ability to identify, isolate, correct***

4) **Too much emphasis on scheme**

PART 1: PRESENTATION GOALS

1) **Teach safe and effective tackling technique that can be worked on year round.**
   - *Part 1 focuses on the striking portion of the tackle*

2) **Provide drills that can improve tackling technique and address technical problems**

3) **Create *KNOCKBACKS!***

4) **Encourage Coaches to become more detailed in teaching tackling.**
   - *Exaggerate coaching points in drills*
   - ***Coaching cues & buzz words***

COACHING CUES / BUZZWORDS

- *Rip Up (not wrap)*
- *Head Up*
- *See what you hit*
- *Holsters*
- *Eyes at ball level*
- *Arms*
- *Sink*
- *Clamp*
- *Squeeze*
- *Violent Double Uppercuts*
- *Grab Cloth*
- *Drive*
- *Feet Feet Feet*
- *Sky the Eyes*
- *Brrrrrrrrtt*
- *Hit Up*
- *Shimmy*
- *Profile*

- *Coach on the fly & improve practice tempo*
- *Only focus on 1 or 2 teaching points per drill. Otherwise → Paralysis by Analysis*
- *Make sure all coaches are consistent with terminology*

The most important fundamental aspect of teaching tackling is?

Keeping the top of the head out of contact!

We say: *"Lead with the chin and the chest and strike with the chest"*

Tackling Technique Evolution

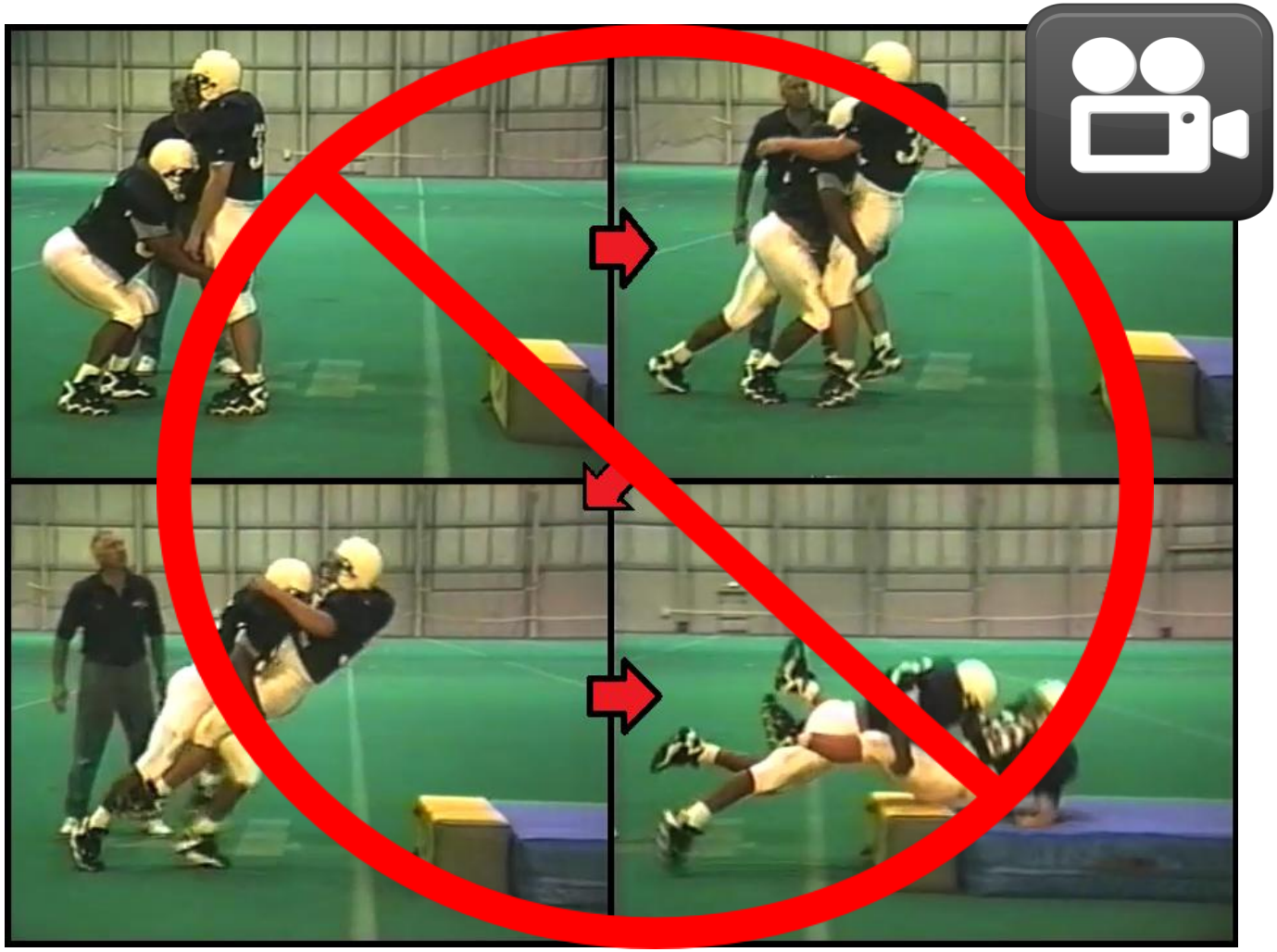
1940s and 1950s
Tackling Instructional Resources

Tackling Technique Evolution

1980s and 1990s

Tackling Instructional Resources

Bite the ball



Tackling Technique Evolution

Present Day: Heads Up Chest Tackling

- Contact initiated with the front of the shoulder pads and the chest

WHY CHEST TACKLING?

1. Safer!

- *Emphasizes taking the head out of contact*
- *Not going to ground in most drills cuts down on injuries in practice.*

2. *It encourages gang tackling.*

3. ***It allows time for stripping the ball.***

4. *It cuts down on miss hits and tackles.*

5. *Great carryover to all situational tackles.*

From: http://www.ythfootballforum.com

TEACHING CHEST TACKLING

WHERE DO WE START?

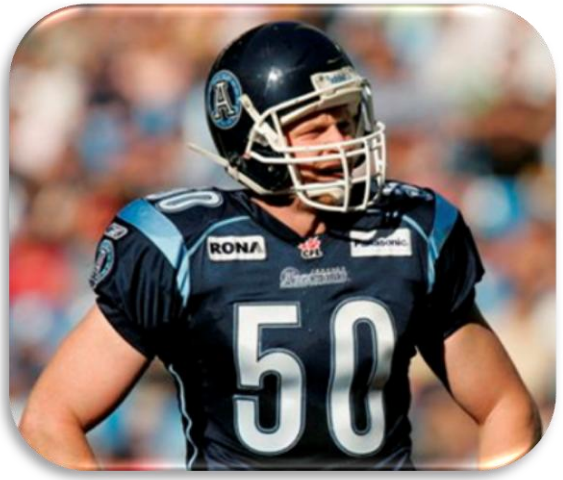
- Tackling is a complex skill
- Dynamic and unpredictable nature
- Every tackle is different → countless variables:

  - *Ball carrier / tackler size*
  - *Tackle angle*
  - *Chasing ball carrier?*
  - *Tackler / ball carrier speed*
  - *Game situation (keep inbounds or need turnover late in the game)*
  - *Receiver catching a ball*
  - *2nd or 3rd man in to contact*
  - *Field location (sideline, endzone)*
  - *Available help / defender leverage*
  - *Ball carrier skill set*
  - *Body position*
  - *Etc...*

TEACHING TACKLING
WHERE DO WE START?

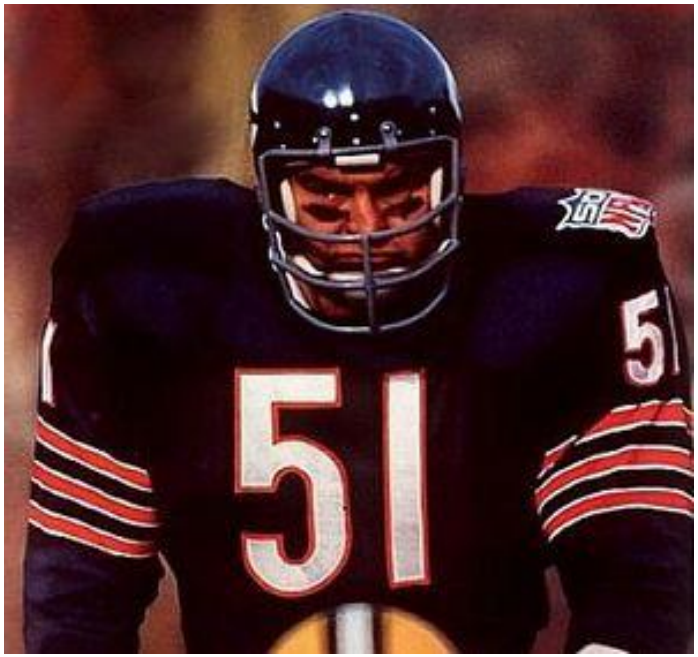
- We start with the act of striking the ball carrier
- We refer to the act of striking the ball carrier as: ***The Hit Up***
- *"Learn to walk before you can run"*

THE HIT UP



OBJECTIVES:

1. Get the ball carrier on the ground
2. Knock the ball carrier backwards
3. Tackle with violence and power to create fumbles



CHEST TACKLING – THE HIT UP

THE HIT UP

- ***Begin the tackling teaching progression with "<u>The Finish</u>"***
  - *After initial contact when tackler is driving the ball carrier back or into the ground*
- Shows players the body posture that they are striving to achieve in a successful tackle.

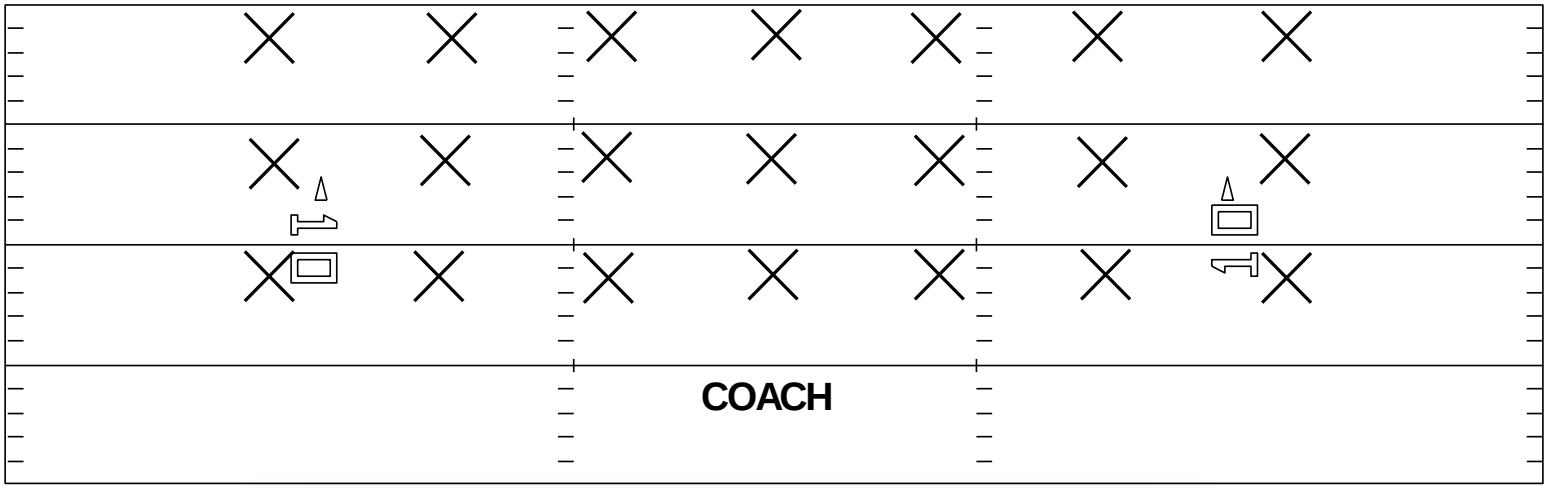
FINISH POSITION: THE CLAMP

- ✓ Feet hip width apart
- ✓ Feet slightly staggered *(alternate staggered foot)*
- ✓ Hips shot through ball carrier *(squeeze cheeks, tuck tail)*
- ✓ Hands above the head
- ✓ Form claw – pinkies together
- ✓ Knuckles up, elbows down
- ✓ Eyes focused on the pinkies
- ✓ Squeeze elbows *(pec deck)*
- ✓ Every muscle tensed

DRILL EXAGGERATION FOR EMPHASIS!

GRID ALIGNMENT

- Maximize repetitions
- Coach can view multiple players at once



FINISH POSITION: THE CLAMP
DRIVE PHASE

- ✓ **Pull the ball carrier into you**
- ✓ **Drive the knees high and wide** *(engulf the ball carrier)*
- ✓ **Maintain clamp for 10 yards or until the echo of the whistle stops.**

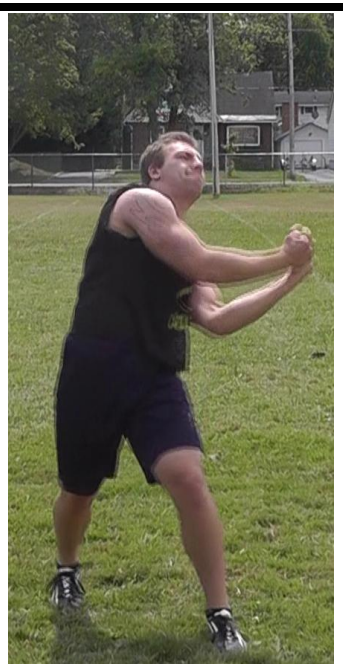
FINISH POSITION DRILL PROGRESSION

1. *Hold Finish Position*
2. *Finish March*
3. *Finish Double Time the Knees*
4. *Finish Torque*
5. *Finish March on Partner*

Football Canada

SAULT SABERCATS Football Club

Finish Torque

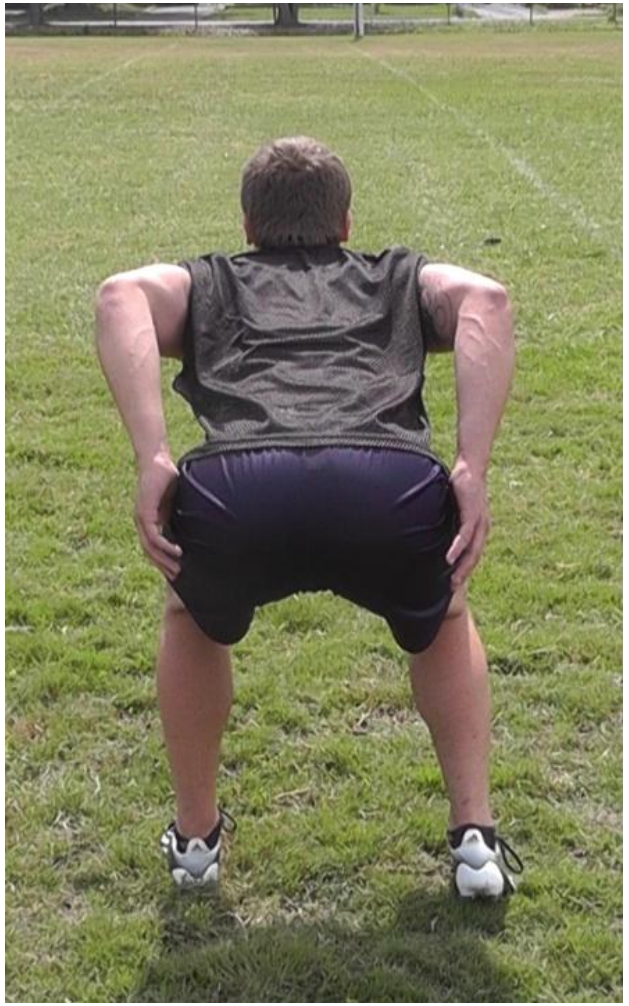


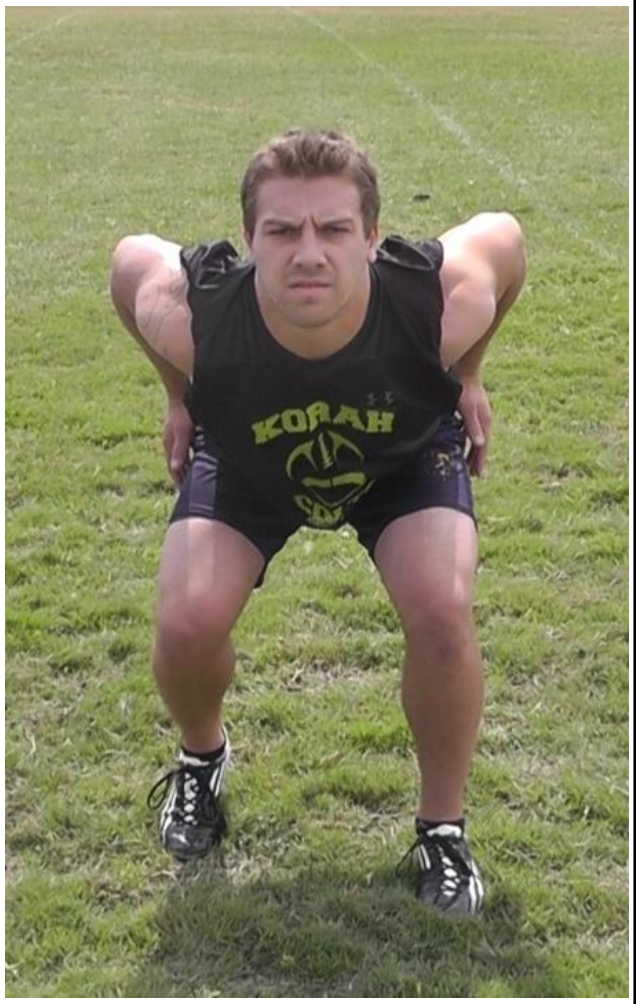
Finish March on Partner

PRE-CONTACT BODY POSITION

- ✓ Hands begin at holsters *(e.g. Gunslinger)*
- ✓ Sink the hips *(cocked and loaded)*
- ✓ Concave arch in low back
- ✓ Eyes at ball level *(slightly higher for shimmy)*
- ✓ *Be **compact** & ready to explode*
- ✓ ***"Feet, Wings, Sink"***

PRE-CONTACT BODY POSITION





- Can the athlete perform a proper body weight squat?
- Hip mobility *(ability to hinge at the hips)*
- Hip mobility circuit

Football Canada™

PRE-CONTACT BODY POSITION

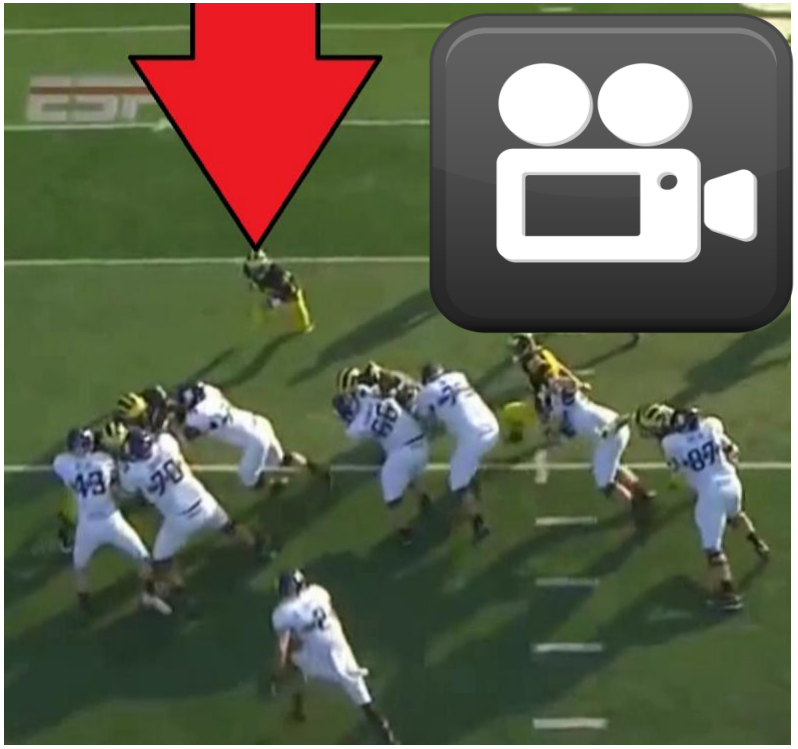
- Can vary slightly depending on type of tackle being made and body type.

SHIMMY TACKLE **vs.** **PROFILE TACKLE**

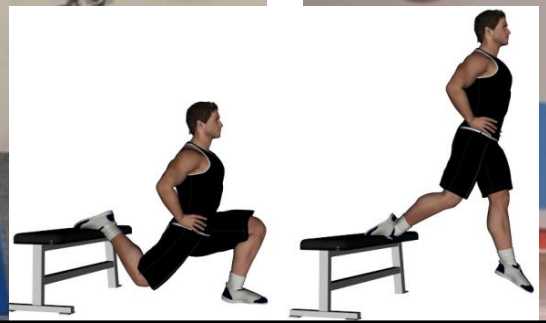
STRICKING THE BALL CARRIER: INITIATING THE STRIKE

- ✓ Do not hit up until you can *"step on the ball carrier's toes or smell his breath"*
- ✓ Shoot violent double uppercuts (Rip Up!)
- ✓ Scrape paint with the elbows → tight to sides
- ✓ Pop the chest & thrust the hips <u>through</u> the ball carrier
- ✓ Drive the back knee through
- ✓ Sky the eyes
- ✓ Clamp: grab cloth, squeeze the pinkies and elbows

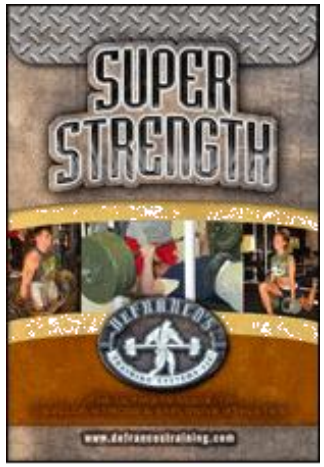
STRICKING THE BALL CARRIER

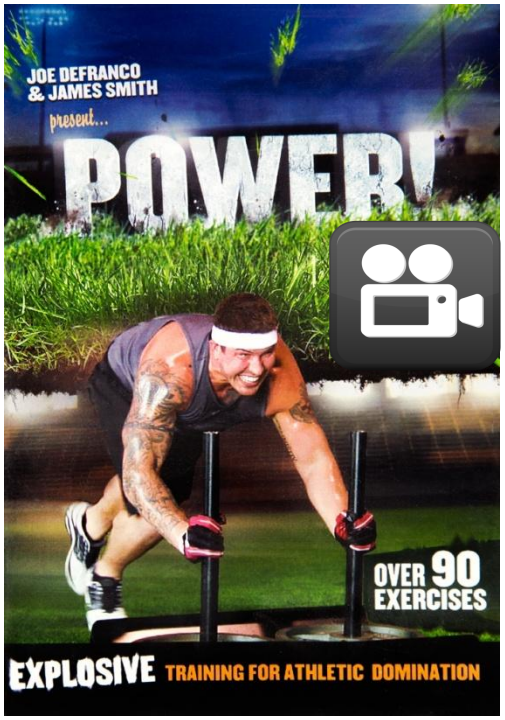


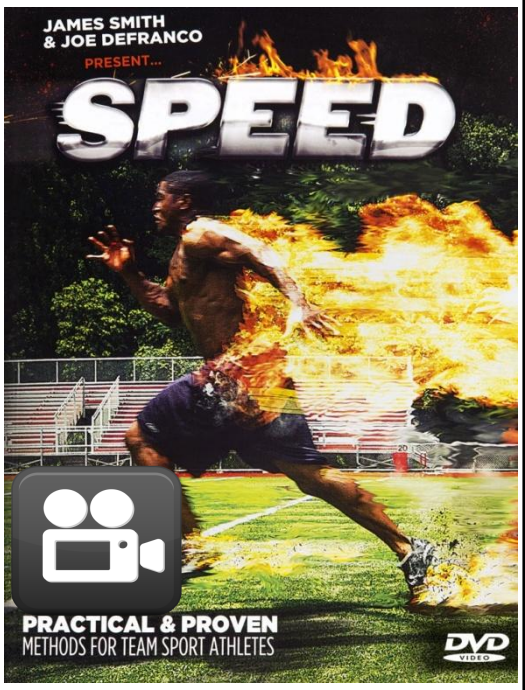
EXPLOSIVE HIP POWER!



STRENGTH & CONDITIONING







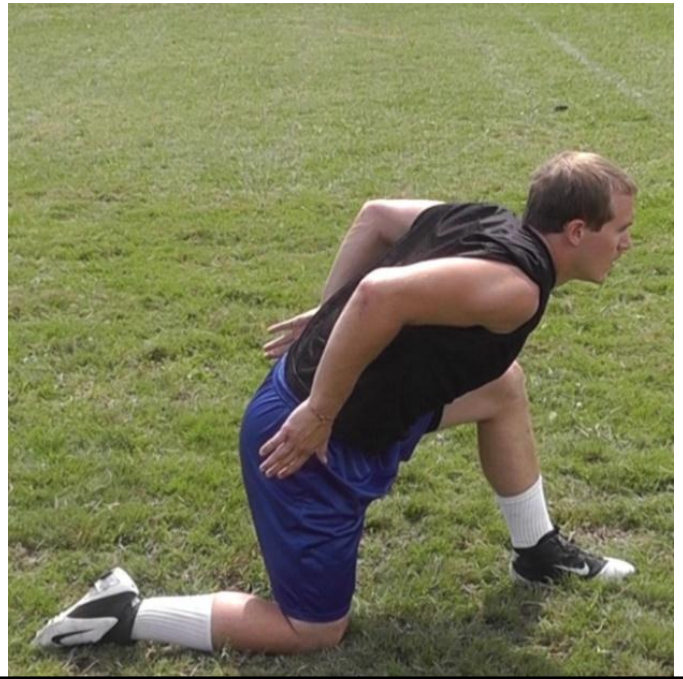
DEFRANCO'S
TRAINING SYSTEMS LLC

HIT UP DRILLS

➢ HIT UP FROM KNEE

- First strike drill we do
- Important that tackler explosively extends his hips
- "*Violent double uppercuts*!"
- Sky the eyes
- Squeeze the pinkies and elbows
- Works synchronized arm and hip explosion

Start



Finish

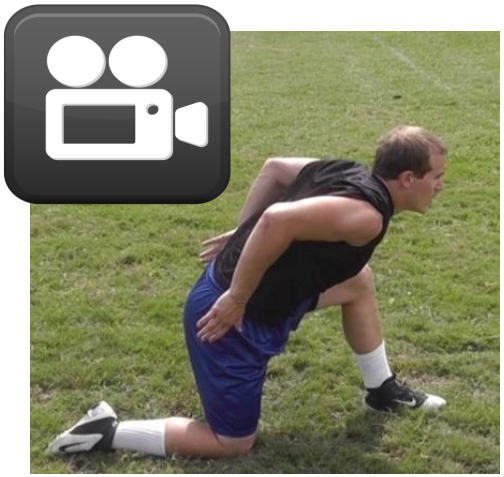
TRAINING CAMP: DAY 1

HIT UP DRILLS

➢ KNEE TO FINISH

- Make sure back foot has shoelaces on the ground not the sole of the shoe. This forces the tackler to use explosive hips to propel his movement and not pushing off the back toe.
- Explosively shoot hands & hips.
- **Transition to drive phase → should look fluid**.
- Double time the knees high & wide (engulf the ball carrier)
- Squeeze the pinkies and elbows
- Eyes focused on pinkies

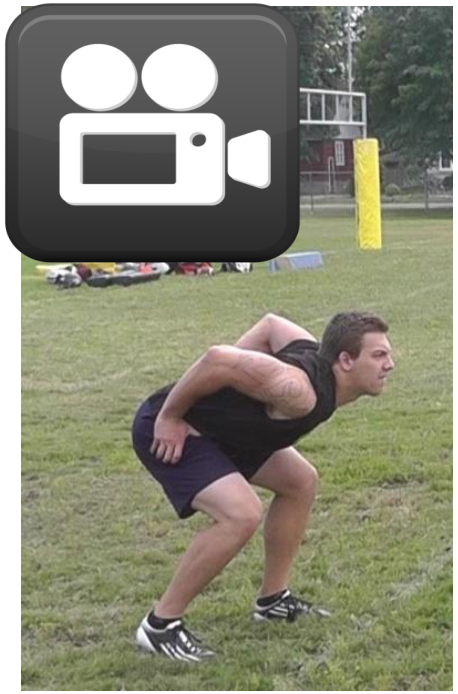
Start → **Finish**



HIT UP DRILLS

- **FLAT BACK HIT UP** (pre-contact position)
  - *Can be done on air or with resistance bands*

Start → **Finish**



HIT UP DRILLS

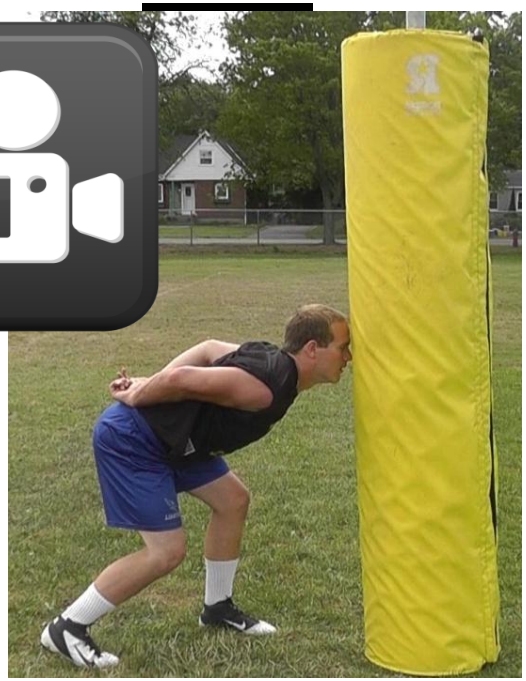
- FLAT BACK HIT UP WITH RESISTANCE BAND

HIT UP DRILLS

➢ GOAL POST – HIP & KNEE DRIVE

- Start in flat back position with hands behind back and chin on goal post pad
- On “HIT” command, tackler drives his back knee forward and up, explodes his hips through the pad, pops his chest and skies his eyes
- Change the stagger foot throughout the drill

Start → **Finish**



HIT UP DRILLS

➢ GOAL POST – HIT UP FINISH

- Start in flat back position with chin on goal post pad and hands on holsters
- On “HIT” command, tackler rips up with violent double uppercuts, drives his back knee forward and up, explodes his hips through the pad, pops his chest and skies his eyes
- Double time the knees high and wide until the whistle
- Change the stagger foot throughout the drill

Start → **Finish**

GOAL POST HIT UP (REAR VIEW)

- **Sink the clamp deep** *(attempt to touch pinkies together)*
- **This allows tackler to initiate contact with the chest**
- **Squeeze the pinkies and elbows** *(old pec deck machine)*

HIT UP DRILLS

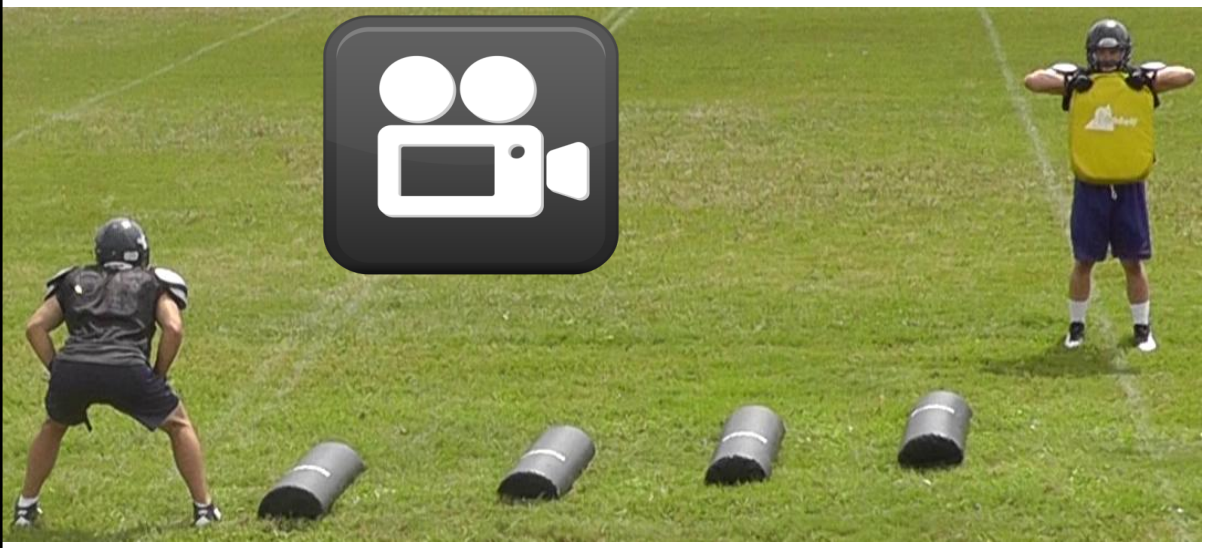
➢HIT UP ON RESISTED HAND SHIELD

- Provides sensation of striking & driving against resistance
- 'Ball carrier' must hold hand shield properly (protect chin)
- Ease players into live contact & build confidence.
- Gradually increase the distance between tackler & ball carrier

Start → **Finish**

HIT UP DRILLS

- **HIT UP ON RESISTED HAND SHIELD PROGRESSION**
  - Agility drill, or down-up, or backpedal / shuffle transition can be added before the tackler strikes the ball carrier.
  - Develops body awareness and teaches players how to get into a proper pre-contact position from various game-like situations.



HIT UP DRILLS

➢ HIT UP ON BALL CARRIER

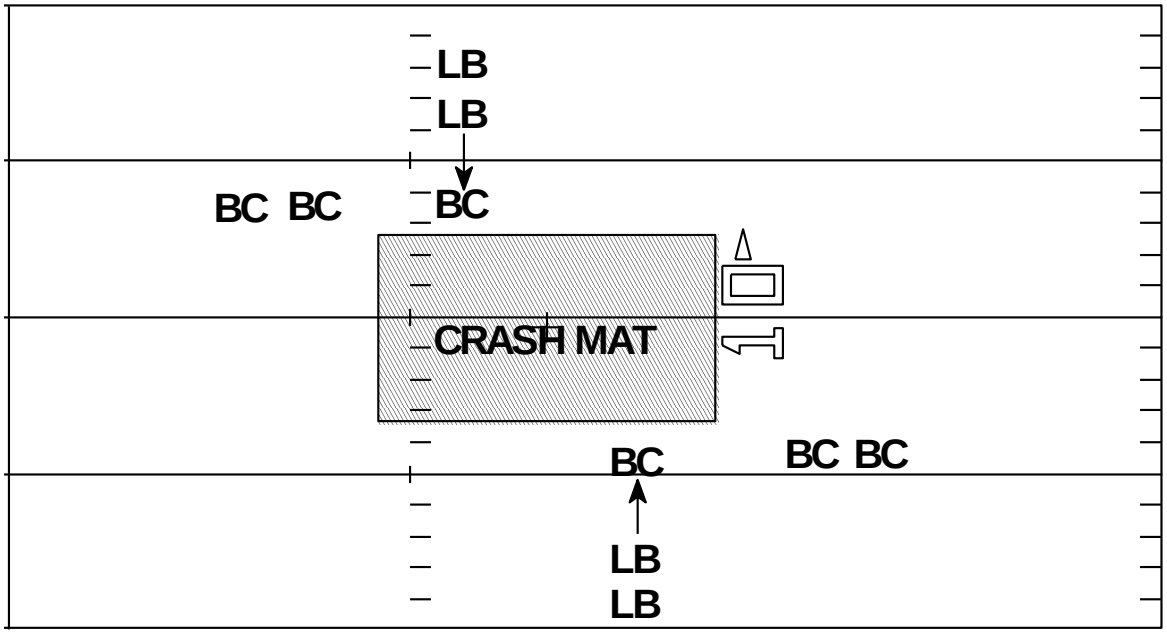
- More realistic feel
- **Coach up the <u>dummy ball carrier</u> to**:
  - ➢*Advance at about 60 - 90% percent effort*
  - ➢*Immediately stop feet after he feels contact.*
  - ➢*Allows tackler to experience game speed but also the sensation of finishing tackle. Higher success rate builds confidence.*
- Added as a finish to any block shedding drill or agility drill.
- Critical for developing **<u>perfect technique muscle memory</u>**.
- Great drill for helping coaches indentify breakdowns in tackling technique.

HIT UP DRILLS

➢ SPLATTER DRILL

- Final drill we do before introducing live contact.
- Players taken to the ground in this drill
- Teaches tacklers how to ***HIT <u>THROUGH</u>*** the ball carrier
- On the "hit" command, tackler attacks the ball carrier, sinks into a pre-contact position, strikes the ball carrier and drives him back into the crash mat. This is all done at full speed in one fluid motion.

BC = Ball Carrier
LB = Linebacker



SPLATTER DRILL

SPLATTER DRILL

- **Dummy ball carrier**
  - Approximately 1 to 1.5 yards away from crash mat
  - Hold hand shield against body, elbows high, protect chin
  - Do not move, you're a tackling dummy
- **Tackler**
  - Approximately 3 to 4 yards away from dummy ball carrier
  - Start in an athletic stance

Start → **Finish**

NOW WE'RE READY FOR LIVE CONTACT DRILLS

➢ Hit Up drill progression summary

1.Hold Finish Position

2.Finish March

3.Finish Double Time the Knees

4.Finish Torque

5.Finish March on Partner

6.Hit up from Knee

7.Hit up from Knee to Double time

8.Goal Post – Chest Pop & Knee Drive

9.Goal Post – Hit Up & Finish

10.Hit Up on Resisted Hand Shield (plus variations)

11.Hit Up on Ball Carrier

12. Splatter Drill

LIVE CONTACT COMPETITIVE DRILLS

- Match up players according to size, ability & experience.
- It's safer & provides weaker athletes with a greater chance of being successful → builds confidence!

LIVE CONTACT DRILLS

➢GOAL LINE TACKLE

- Ball carrier & tackler approx. 1.5 yards apart.
- Tackler's heels on the goal line
- Ball carrier positions arms to receive a hand-off from a coach
- Tackler is in the pre-contact position
- Drill begins when coach hands the ball to the ball carrier
- Ball carrier attempts to cross the goal line but he cannot juke or spin; he must try to run through the tackler.

➢***We very rarely take ball carriers to the ground in practice → most injuries occur when players go to the ground.***

GOAL LINE TACKLE DRILL

- **The drill ends when one of 4 things happens:**
  - *Ball carrier crosses the goal line*
  - *Tackler drives the ball carrier back a few yards*
  - *Extended stalemate that lasts longer than 4 sec.*
  - *Player(s) go to the ground.*

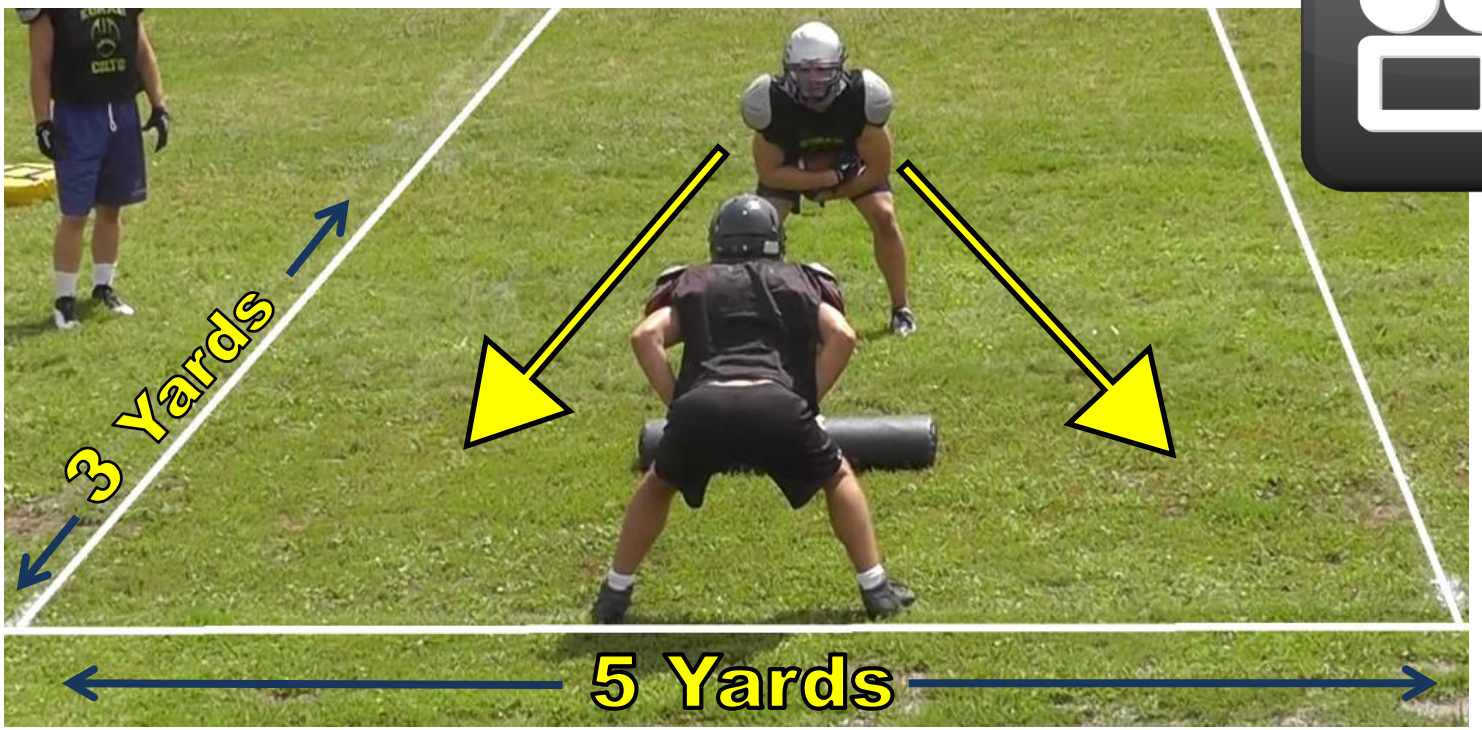
Start → **Finish**

GOAL LINE TACKLE DRILL

- Slightly increase the distance between players to about 2 yards

3rd & GOAL DRILL

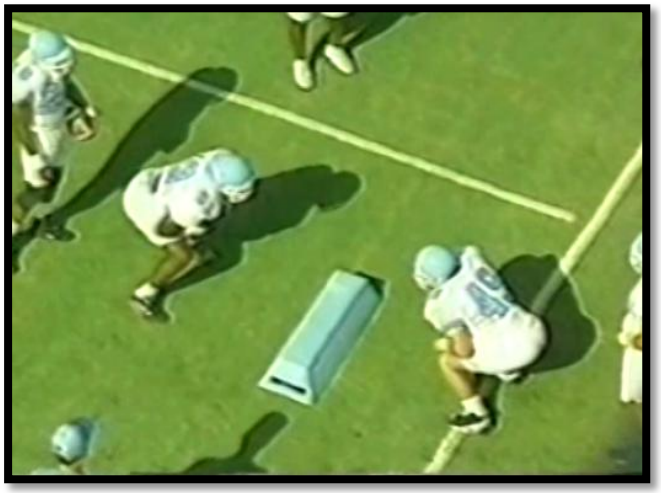
- Same premise as “Goal Line Tackle” drill, but now players approximately 3 to 4 yards apart and the runner must break right or left.
- Place an agility bag between the players. Tackler’s heels are on the goal line.
- Ball carrier cannot juke or spin

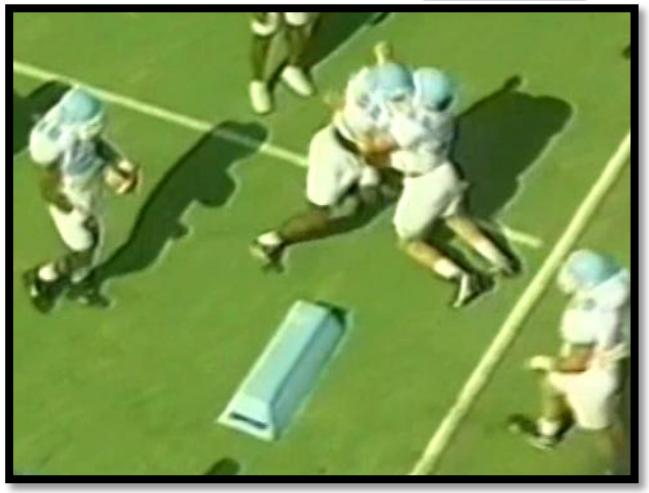


3rd & GOAL DRILL

- Competitive: RBs vs. LBs
- Keep score?
- This drill can also be run at slower tempos to focus on technique

Start

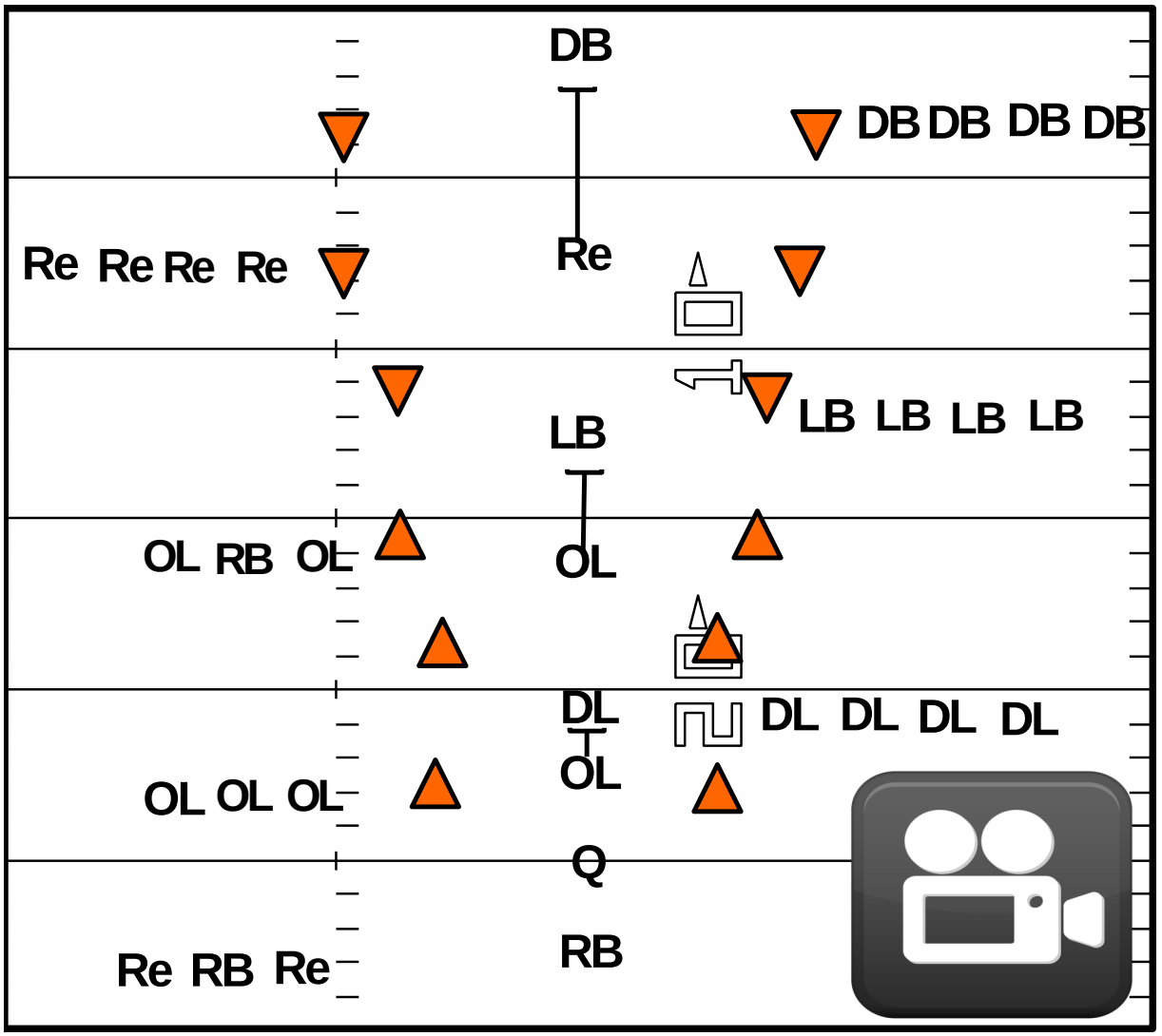




Finish

FUNNEL DRILL

- Live tackling team drill
- Keep score, **COMPETE!**



ADDITIONAL HIT UP DRILLS

- **Use additional drills for variety or to address specific technical flaws.**

- **Technical flaws can be categorized in one of three areas:**

1. **Hands / Arms** - *tackler isn't properly shooting uppercuts and/or isn't securing a proper clamp*

2. **Hips** - *tackler does not bring his hips when he tackles or he isn't generating enough force with his hips when he tackles*

3. **Feet** - *tackler stops his feet on contact or leaves his feet to make contact*

DRILLS FOR HANDS / ARMS

Start

Finish

UPPERCUT
&
CLAMP DRILL

DRILLS FOR HANDS / ARMS

UPPERCUT DRILL

Start

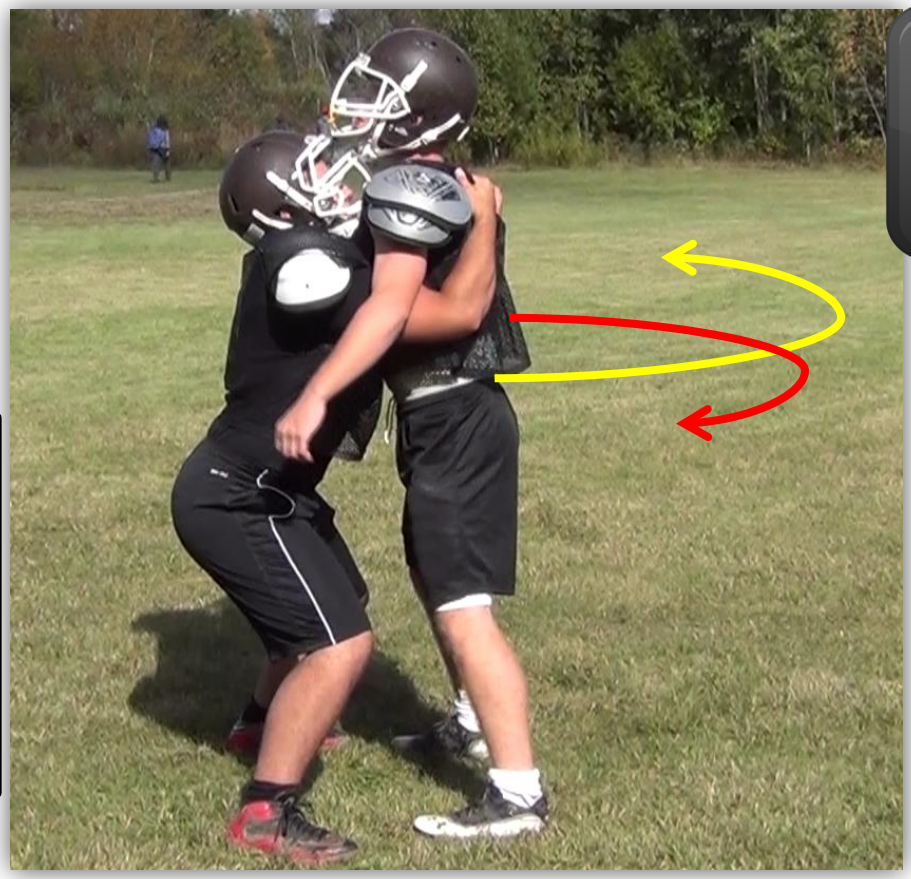
Finish

Violent hands / uppercuts can create fumbles

HIT UP DRILLS: HANDS / ARMS

SPIN DRILL

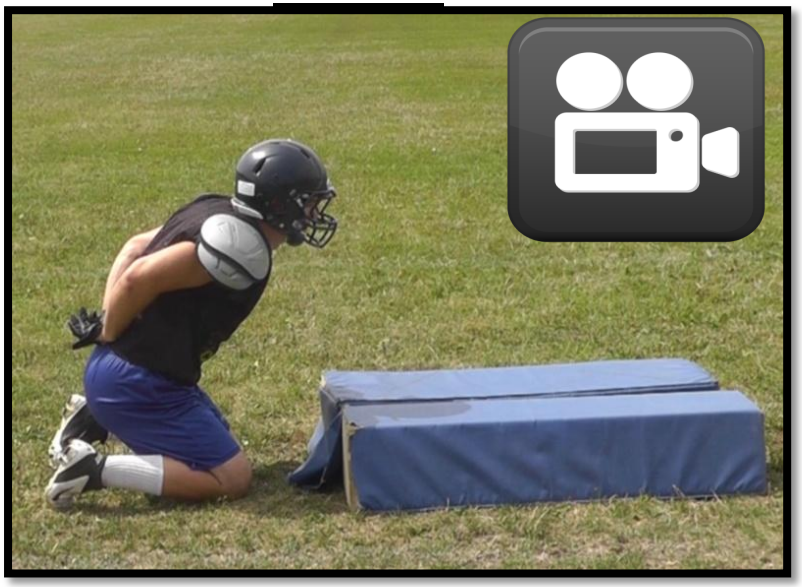
- Tackler starts in fit up position on ball carrier with a tight clamp
- Ball carrier will try to spin free from the tackler
- Tackler must move his feet and maintain clamp until the whistle



Must train grip strength!

HIT UP DRILLS: HIPS

Start

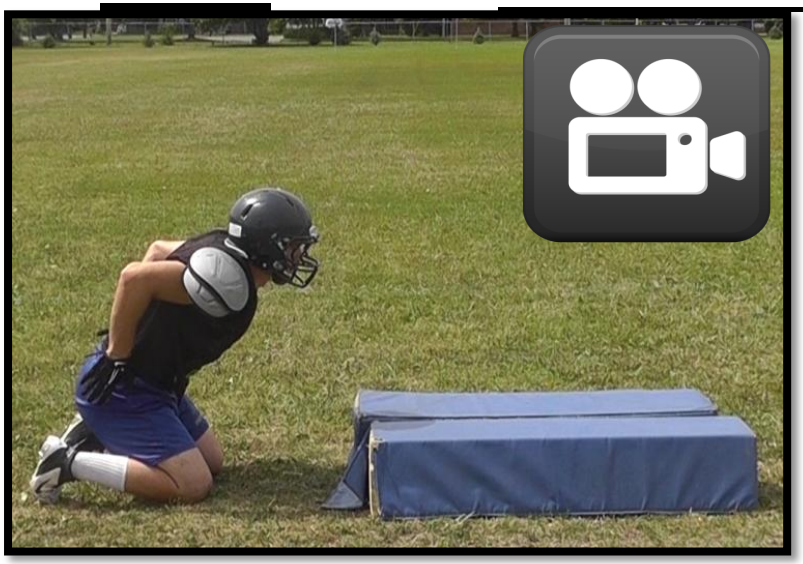


Finish

Start

SUPERMAN DRILL

Finish



HIT UP DRILLS: HIPS

Start

HIT UP

FROM KNEES

ON HAND SHIELD

Finish

HIT UP DRILLS: HIPS

HIT UP FROM KNEES ON PARTNER

Start

Finish

HIT UP DRILLS: HIPS

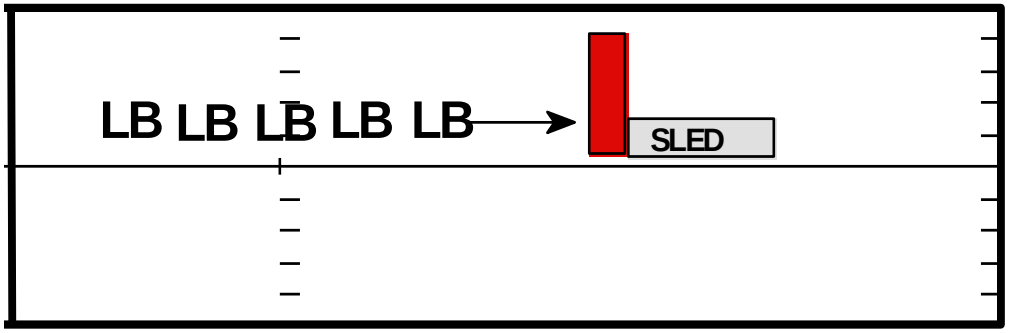
COACH BOBBY HOSEA'S
TEUA
TRAIN 'EM UP ACADEMY
Advancing the Science of Tackling Safety & Performance since 1997

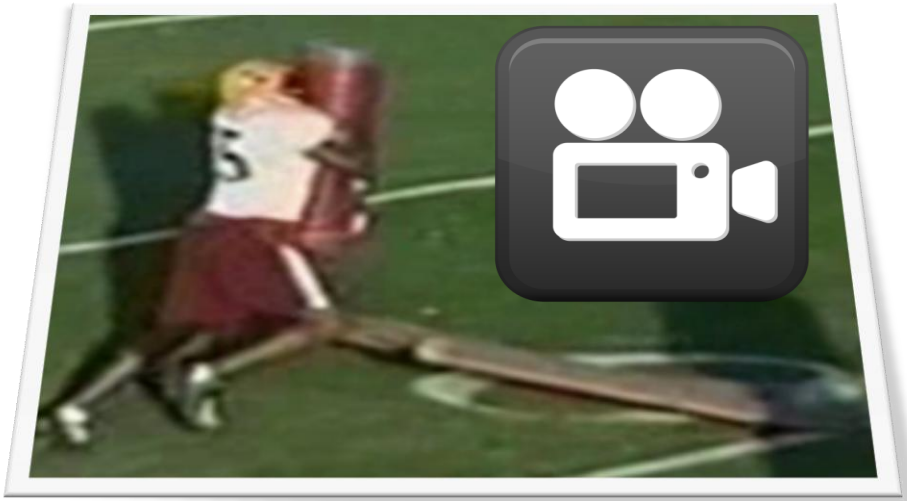
HIT UP DRILLS: FEET

HIT UP ON SHELLS

MORE HIT UP DRILLS: HANDS – HIPS – FEET

- **Tackle Sled**





- **Pop & Latch** *(3 Pop)*

A QB IN A TACKLING PRESENTATION?

"You just react naturally and let all the fundamentals and muscle memory that you've built up take over."

Aaron Rodgers, 2011

- ***Simply saying "keep your head up" isn't enough.***
- ***Need to condition players through repetitions and drill work to the point that they don't have to think about it – they just do it always!***

DARIN SLACK APPROACH TO TEACHING FUNDAMENTALS

TOP 10 MISTAKES IN THE HIT UP

10. **Tackler is too high** → *Must sink hips and get eyes at ball level. Need to work on hip mobility with stiff athletes.*
    Corrective Drill: Eyes Mirror Ball Level

9. **Hitting up too soon** → *Don't hit up until "you can step on the ball carriers feet or smell his breath", "Smell belly button lint"*
    Corrective Drill: Hit Up & Drive variations

8. **Feet stop after contact** → *Must emphasize knee drive and accelerating the feet after contact. "Feet Feet Feet!"*
    Corrective Drills: Goal Post Hit Up & Drive
    Hit Up from Pre-Contact Position variations
    Tackling Sled

TOP 10 MISTAKES IN THE HIT UP

7. **Waiting for the ball carrier instead of attacking and initiating contact.** → *Attack mentality, no free yards. "Be the HAMMER, not the nail". Use lines on field to show players*

   Corrective Drills: 3rd & Goal

6. **Not clamping down / grabbing cloth** → *Securing the tackle = more consistent tackling "No shame in getting run over, but there is shame in letting go". Develop upper body strength (especially grip)*

   Corrective Drills: Clamp Finish Position Hold

   Uppercut & Clamp
   Spin Drill

   Goal Post Hit Up & Drive

“No shame in getting run over, but there is shame in letting go”

TOP 10 MISTAKES IN THE HIT UP

5. Tackler doesn't thrust his hips through the ball carrier → *Sky the eyes and rip up to bring the hips. Must develop hip explosion in the weight room. Shouldn't be any space between tackler's hips and the ball carrier.*

Corrective Drills: Hit Up from Knee

Hit Up From Knees on Hand Shield / Partner

Superman Drill

Splatter Drill

Hit Up & Drive variations

4. Tackler turns sideways or isn't squared up → *Can't rip up and grab cloth if sideways, leads to missed tackles. More vulnerable to jukes.*

Corrective Drills: All Drills

Hit Up & Drive variations

TOP 10 MISTAKES IN THE HIT UP

3. Not sinking the uppercuts and clamp deep enough *(T-Rex arms or catching the ball carrier)* →

Must attempt to get pinkies to touch behind ball carrier, this allows striking with the chest.

Corrective Drills: *Uppercut & Clamp*

Goal Post Hit Up & Drive

Spin Drill

2. Wrapping instead of ripping up with the arms →

Two opposite forces working against each other. Wrapping leads to head down posture. Buzz words "Violent double uppercuts", "ARMS!"

Corrective Drills: *Hit Up on Hand Shield / Partner*

Superman Drill with Arms

Hit Up from Knee

Hit Up & Drive variations

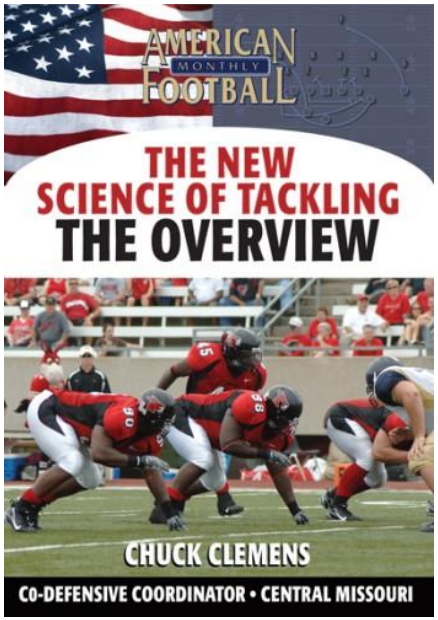
TOP 10 MISTAKES IN THE HIT UP

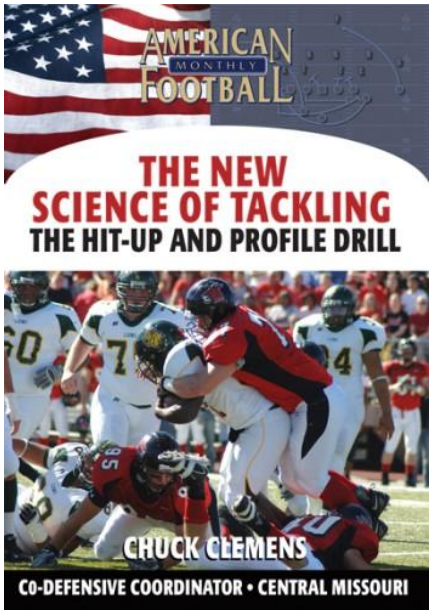
1. **Head not up →** *MUST SEE WHAT YOU HIT for safety and performance. "Lead with the chin and chest and strike with the chest".*

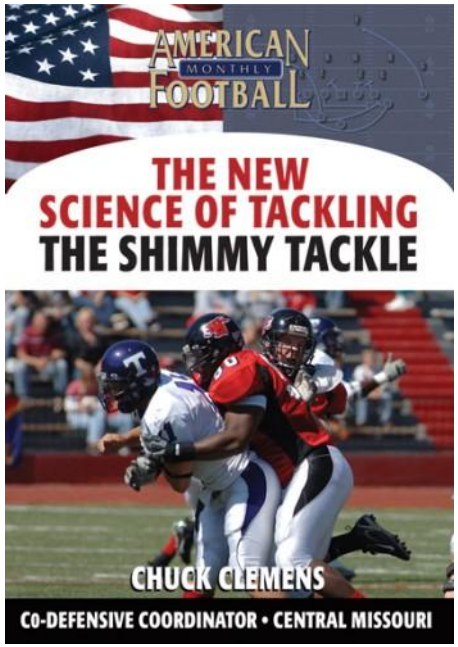
- ***Never allow players to advance through the tackling progression until they can consistently demonstrate the ability to keep their head up!***

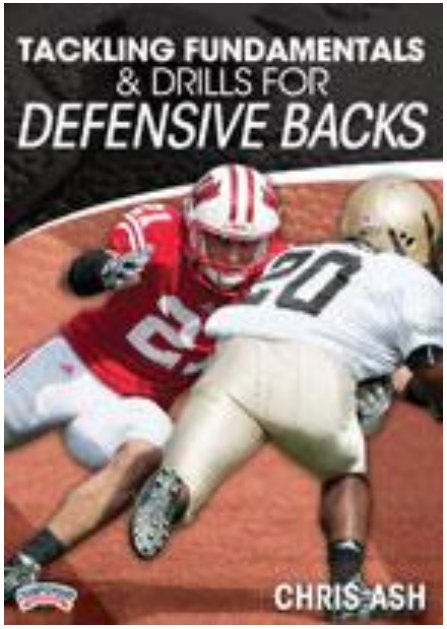
Corrective Drills: ***ALL OF OUR DRILLS STRESS THIS KEY POINT!***

VIDEO RESOURCES









VIDEO RESOURCES

Rick Ponx
North Central College
DRILL DVD

FCPGA

Bill Williams

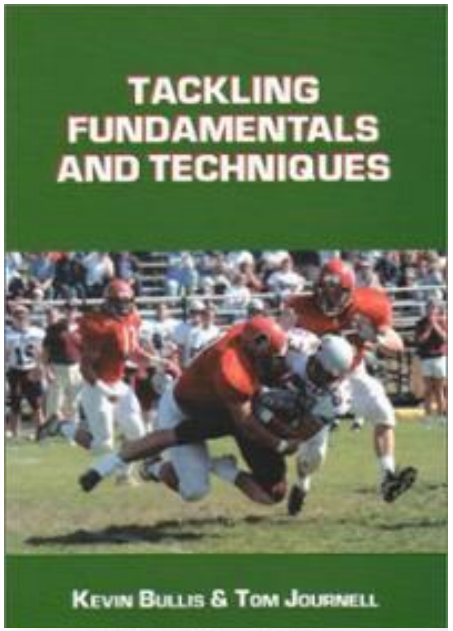
PRINT RESOURCES

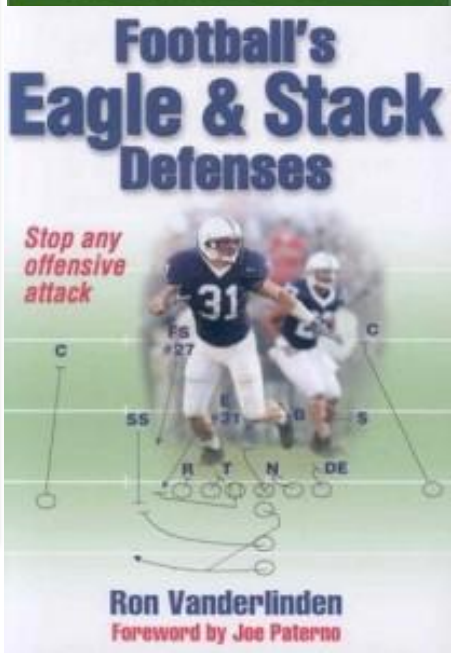
SPECIAL TEAMS' FUNDAMENTALS 1

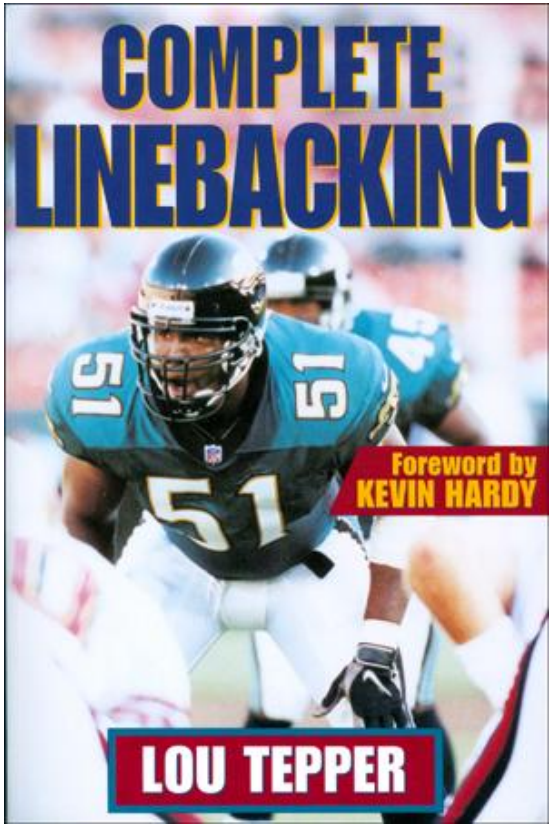
Teaching Open Field Tackling for SPECIAL TEAMS From Grassroots to the CFL.

Scott Fawcett
Assistant Coach
Hamilton Tiger Cats

Eyes at football level. Same foot, same shoulder. Win with my feet.







Football Canada

ONLINE RESOURCES

1. Football Canada: *Safe Contact Module*
http://www.footballcanada.com

2. Christopher Nowinski, *The Impact of Concussions in Youth and College Sports*
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhksd34WwYQ

3. Bobby Hosea BIG HITTS Training Academy:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iIuemVW8RE8

4. Viator Football Tackling Drills:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QB8zyTgsp8g
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jE-kkF_UQOs

5. Coach Huey : www.coachhuey.com

6. Football USA online videos:
http://www.usafootball.com/health-safety/videos-and-downloads

7. Football USA YouTube Channel
http://www.youtube.com/user/usafootballTV

8. Intelligence Squared U.S. Debates: *Ban College Football? (May 8th, 2012)*
http://fora.tv/2012/05/08/Ban_College_Football

THANK YOU!

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Tom Annett

Sault Sabercats (OVFL)
Korah C. & V. S.
Sault Ste. Marie, ON

annettt@email.adsb.on.ca

KORAH COLTS FOOTBALL

Football Canada
Coaches Association des entraîneurs

SAULT SABERCATS Football Club