

Teaching the Slide Tackle

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Focus: Teaching the technical skill of slide tackle in a safe and effective manner.

Age: 12-16

Equipment: A ball and cone for each player.

Players: Any number of players. Even number preferred, but easily adapted to odd number by making one group of 3.

Space: This exercise only requires a small space. A 30x30 area would be perfectly adequate. A wet or snowy pitch is much better than a dry hard one. Long grass also works well.

Introduction:

I have had good success teaching slide tackles, and they ARE an important technique to master. The critical thing is to help the players understand when to use them and when not to. A slide tackle is NOT an OK excuse for poor defensive positioning! It is preferred to stay on your feet and get into recovery mode as soon as possible. Much better to have position on the opponent and not have to use a slide tackle. A slide tackle is almost always required to make up for a defensive mistake. Don't let these mistakes become habit just because you can slide tackle!

Setup and Execution:

Initial Phase: I gave each player a cone and ball. We began by learning to transition from a run to a slide. Many, MANY players are not at all comfortable with this, and until they can do it without hesitation (and preferably with a grin on their face), they will not be able to learn how to effectively execute the slide tackle.

Key coaching point at this phase are:

- Don't jump up in the air, it makes you land harder on the ground and not slide, but bounce.
- Slide onto your hip area, and as has been said already, on one hip.
- Tuck the lower leg in (bend at the knee about 90 degrees).
- Don't catch either foot on the ground as you slide.

Cone Phase: Next, I introduced the cone as a target. The purpose of this phase was to get the players accustomed to hooking the ball, and not just poking it away. The poke motion IS a useful technique in some situations, but with younger players, if they cannot hook the ball away, I find that the challenge is usually too late. With the cone, the object is to place the cone about 20 feet away, take a few steps and slide to either side of the cone, hooking it AND PULLING OVER TOWARDS THE DIRECTION YOU CAME FROM. This is an important step, because it will help them actually WIN the ball, and not just kick it away, or worse yet miss the attempt and

allow the opponent by unimpeded!

Coaching points for this phase:

- Slide on the hip that is on the same side as the cone.
 - Time the challenge so that you are horizontal as your foot reaches the cone.
 - Roll over towards your stomach as you contact the cone.
 - Get back up to your feet ASAP after knocking the cone over in the proper direction.
- You should be facing the direction from which you came.
- If some players constantly knock the cone over in the wrong way, they are likely passing too close to the cone, increase the spacing slightly.

Ball Phase: NOW, you are ready to move on to work with the ball. I begin with the same exact setup as the cone. Once they can get the ball moving back towards the way they came (should be rather quickly, more of a review), then I pair up the players and we begin to work on the moving slide tackle. Before we begin, I remind the players that we are WORKING TOGETHER to help each other, and at first we WANT the tackler to be successful, so DON'T try to avoid the tackler, just dribble slow and steady!

One player has the ball and dribbles in a straight line with the partner on one side. Pace should be fairly slow. Tackler should commit, and follow through getting back onto her feet immediately. Exchange roles after a couple attempts. Expect to spend a long time working at this phase. Timing will be a BIG issue for some players. Coaching points:

- Time your tackle properly.
- Gain a tiny bit of space between you and the opponent right before your slide, NOT shoulder to shoulder!
- HOOK the ball, don't poke it away. If you have to poke it away, you are too far behind (older players can and should be taught this poke tackle, but IMHO, not younger ones, until they have some experience with tackling and have gained some patience defensively).
- Try to roll back onto the tackling foot, standing back up using the momentum of the slide to aid you. You can also use your lower, bent leg to help push your body back upright.
- Get weight behind the tacking leg.
- Tackling leg EVEN WITH THE BELLY OF THE BALL! This is critically important. Too high and it is a foul or missed tackle. Too low and the ball will roll over the tackling foot and allow the opponent to regain possession.
- Back onto feet immediately!