



# Tackle Height Law Trials 2023/24

Frequently Asked Questions (updated 25 July 2023)

# Tackle Height Law Trials

The underlying objective of the tackle height law trials is to reduce the number of head-on-head contacts and concussions.

The tackle is an extremely dynamic event and there are many different variables in every tackle. So how can coaches prepare players for these different tackle scenarios, and how can referees manage different tackle scenarios?

Referees should apply Laws based on the principle that infringements should be “clear and obvious”, if not – PLAY ON.

Referees should use the Tackle Height Decision Making Framework to help guide their decision making.

## Tackle Scenarios

**Scenario 1** - The ball carrier dropping their torso into the tackle/tackler just prior to contact.

- What are the considerations for the referee? The Referee needs to understand the head contact process and accurately apply judgment “Is there foul play - Yes or No”. Referees understanding of mitigation factors is important.
- How will that situation be refereed?
  - If the tackler is attempting to execute a legal tackle, having dropped their height to tackle below the sternum, then they should not be deemed to have committed foul play.
  - There is no restriction on the ball carrier dropping their height prior to contact.

**Scenario 2** - Close to the try line the ball carrier driving toward the try line with their torso in the horizontal plane.

- How does a defender legally halt the forward progress of the ball carrier?
  - The best options are to tackle low, targeting the legs “Chop tackle”, getting lower than the ball carrier and tackle.
  - Another option may be tackling from the side of the ball carrier or at an angle targeting the tummy area and controlling the leg of the ball carrier.
- What are the considerations for a referee?
  - Can the tackler get any lower than the ball carrier’s sternum based on their angle of attack? Is there “intent” for any dangerous action(s) by defender?

- Advice for referees is to apply judgement and penalise clear and obvious infringements in these scenarios.
- How will that situation be refereed in the game situation?
  - If a tackler(s) is legal in all their actions the referee should NOT deem their actions foul play. Mitigation factors come into play.

### Scenario 3 - The tackler tackles the ball carrier from behind.

- When tackling a player from behind, does the tackle height remain the same as when tackling from the front or side?
  - Yes, however, Referees should consider playing Penalty Kick (PK) advantage if there is no danger and no contact around neck or head.
  - Note: PK advantage is always an option unless there is immediate danger or safety issues for either or both tackler/s and tackled player.
- What are the considerations for the referee? How will that situation be refereed in the game situation?
  - Safety is paramount. If the tackle is from behind and up around the neck or head area, a PK is the appropriate sanction, as opposed to the jersey pull above the high tackle line which advantage might be played from.

### Scenario 4 – The defender grabs the ball carrier by the jersey above the line of the sternum and attempts to halt the ball carrier’s progress, or brings the player to ground to compete for ball.

- If the result of the above action is the defender does not bring the ball carrier to the ground or stop their progress (unsuccessful grab) = unless there is danger or foul play involved, it should be **play on**.
- If the ball carrier is either held up or pulled to the ground by the primary arriving player/tackler (but the “tackler” does not go to ground with the ball carrier) – in these situations, there has been a “successful” contact with the ball carrier. In these situations, the grabbing or holding action would need to be compliant with the tackle height (below the sternum)
- If the second arriving player pulls the ball carrier to the ground to compete for ball, then this is permitted.

### Scenario 5 – The second arriving player attempts to rip the ball from the ball carrier, without making shoulder contact.

- What are the considerations for the referee?
  - The referee should consider if the arriving player is genuinely trying to compete for the ball using their hands/arms. If so, then this situation is play on.
  - If the arriving player makes initial contact on the ball carrier, with their shoulder/chest above the base of the sternum, and then moves onto the ball, this would be deemed an infringement.

# FAQs

## **Q1 - What about 'latching' on the 'pick and go', will this be stopped?**

A – There will be no restrictions to the pick and go, therefore all current laws apply.

## **Q2 - Would targeting the ball by the second tackler not encourage the sharing of head space – something we're trying to avoid?**

A – Once the initial tackle has started, the velocity of the tackle situation will have reduced, therefore reducing the risk of head-on-head contact by any arriving players.

## **Q3 - Can the primary tackler target ball?**

A – Any arriving player can attempt to compete for or rip the ball as long as they do so by making no contact on the ball carrier with their shoulder or chest. Arriving players must be aware that choosing to target the ball comes with a risk of sanction if they make contact above the sternum.

## **Q4 – 'Pick and go' near the try line. Do these now become unstoppable? How does the tackler stop them.**

A – Pick and go situations will be permitted during the trials. It is accepted that the tackler may struggle to tackle below the sternum, and therefore empathy will be given from match officials.

## **Q5 – Will a defender get penalised for making contact above the base of the sternum in the act of preventing a try from being scored?**

If in the act of preventing a ball carrier from scoring, there is some above the base of sternum contact, but the act is passive, low force, low risk etc, that player may NOT be liable to sanction.

## **Q6 - How will success be measured with these trials? Is there baseline data on concussions?**

A – Scottish Rugby is working with the University of Edinburgh and World Rugby to undertake a thorough research study on the impact of these trials. Ultimately the success of the law trials will be a reduction in concussion rates, however player feedback will also play a large factor in determining the player experience.

## **Q7 - Did Scottish Rugby consider conducting any research/trials or are they only doing this now as this has all been raised worldwide?**

A – Scottish Rugby has continued to deliver small scale tackle height law trials since 2017. Scottish Rugby introduced a lower tackle height at U14 age group in 2017/18 as part of age grade law variation trials.

**Q8 - It's already a difficult game to officiate so how can any law changes be as unambiguous as possible to avoid the requirement for lots of interpretation from referees?**

A – Throughout the consultation process a driving principle has been to make as fewer law changes as possible to get maximum benefit (i.e. reducing concussions). The lower tackle height has been trialled in other countries including France and South Africa, and match official feedback has been positive. Scottish Rugby will support all match officials through a variety of training programmes in the lead up to the start of the 23/24 season.

**Q9 - If these law changes are to come into place for season 23/24, it is going to be difficult and a very quick turnaround for schools to implement and coach players these laws due to stopping rugby over Easter/Summer term and summer holidays and when schools return after summer, it's straight into School Conferences, etc.**

A – Scottish Rugby will launch a series of training programmes and roadshows before the school summer holidays to ensure coaches and match officials can have access to support. There will also be a range of online educational materials to support players, coach, match official and volunteer education.

**Q10 – How will cross-border fixtures work if each union takes a different approach?**

A – Scottish Rugby are working closely with the RFU, WRU and IRFU on this topic. It is hoped that each union will align with regard to the tackle height, but if there are any differences then a set of competition specific law trials will be created.

**Q11 - Why are we doing this is the RFU championship trial was stopped due to an increase in concussions?**

A – The Championship Cup arm-pit tackle height evaluation showed a number of promising results; including a 30% reduction in the number of tackles that resulted in contact to the ball carrier's head or neck. Whilst the overall combined concussion rate for the ball carrier and tackler did not increase, there was an increase in concussion risk for the tackler. This was a small-scale study where the impact of 12 concussions in a single week had a disproportionate effect on the overall concussion rate. Unlike our current proposal, there was no formal coaching of the tackle technique required and no attempt to influence the behaviour of the ball carrier. The study was not continued into the knockout rounds of the competition (which were to happen later in the season, after reverting to current laws for the league matches) as it was not deemed sensible for players to have to play with tackle height laws that differed from week to week to enable the collection of a small amount of additional data. Video review of cases of concussion to the tackler highlighted the technical challenge to the tackler when attempting to tackle a bent ball carrier front on.

**Q12 - Should we introduce mandatory head gear to reduce risk of concussion?**

A - Properly fitted headgear can help prevent soft tissue injuries to the head and ears. There is no evidence that headgear provides protection against concussion. Headgear must comply with World Rugby standards.