

Slide Tackling

There is a debate on within the youth soccer community as to when to teach, or even to teach, slide tackling. At many youth, recreation levels, slide tackling is not permitted due to the risk of injury, both to the tackler, and the one being tackled. This is generally because slide tackling is not taught, or taught very little and therefore the execution of this technique is poor, to say the least.

Since slide tackling is part of the game and sooner or later your kids are going to try it, it is probably better if they are taught the right way to do it, rather than let them experiment on their own.

The basics of slide tackling are as follows:

Watch The Ball

When an attacker is running at you with the ball, it's difficult not to concentrate on his body movements. Doing so, however, could cost you a tackle.

More than a few flashy forwards have juke a defender out of his socks while only nominally touching the ball. Such situations, however, can be avoided by keeping your eyes on the ball. If someone is trying to dribble by you and he's coming right at you, you've got to watch the ball. No matter where the attacker's body moves -- he can go right, he can go left -- the ball always sits still.

Don't Tackle Unless It's Necessary

The best place for a defender to be is on his feet, not on the ground, and so one should resist the temptation to leap at an opponent's ankles any time the opportunity presents itself. It's better to contain the forward and prevent him from penetrating. You should also try to work with your fellow defenders to close off the attack without direct confrontation.

If you are the last line of defense, it is particularly important to remain upright. If your slide-tackle fails, your opponent's path to the goal will be clear.

Any time you dive in, there's a chance of you getting beat. Even if you do dive in and get the ball, it can always bounce or deflect off the guy and get by you.

Wait For Your Opponent To Separate From The Ball

As long as your opponent has the ball at his feet, he's in control and a slide-tackle could be suicidal. Wait for him to knock it ahead two or three feet -if you are fairly close by before diving at his feet.

If you tackle when it's at his feet he can knock it away from you or dribble by you. When he separates from the ball, then you cut in front of him without tackling.

And that's perfect because you can keep playing. If you need to tackle, wait for him to separate from the ball, then hook him.

Timing is the crucial ingredient, both for safety and effectiveness. But the quality of the timing is elusive. The most important thing is to get your timing down. If you don't have the right timing, your opponent is going to run right by you

Developing timing requires constant practice, but because training sessions rarely emphasize tackling, games offer the best training ground. Kids always want to practice slide-tackling, but it is not really something you can do in practice. The more you play, better you'll get at it.

Be Decisive

Every time a high level player tries to complete a tackle, he takes the attitude that he is going to get the ball and crush the forward. That's the way you have to think.

Mentality is important, especially at the highest level where the difference between success and failure can be confidence. Players can't hesitate, or they'll be beaten.

When you decide to go down, you have to go down. You can't think twice about it. If you go into a tackle halfway, you can get hurt. Decide 100 percent that you are going, then go.

Knowing when to go requires instinct built through experience, and it requires the ability to read the game.

Attack From An Angle

It is possible to slide-tackle an opponent from behind or from the front. But the risks -- fouls, cards, expulsion -- are great. The best tackles come from an angle. Coming in at an angle also allows the defender to strip an opponent from the ball without tackling.

While racing alongside an opponent, wait for him to separate from the ball. Then step into his path, between him and the ball. Step right into his line. Now you've got the ball, and you can shield it. Chances are, he'll trip you or foul you because you've cut him off.

Tackling from behind, an inexact science which soccer officials are intent on banning, isn't recommended. For every clean tackle from behind, there are four bad ones. You always seem to clip the guy, catch an ankle or something. You might get away with one clean tackle, but many times you are going to foul the guy, and you might seriously hurt him.

Slide-tackling from the front, with both feet, is another matter, and one referees rarely smile upon.

Straight-on, you're going to get the ball first, but obviously you're trying to hurt the guy if you're going in with both feet straight on. That's why referees don't like straight-on tackling. Even if you get the ball, they usually call a foul.

Protect Yourself

The first law of slide-tackling concerns safety, and it begins with shinguards. Full guards may not be as comfortable as smaller models, but defenders don't really have a choice. Nor do they have a choice once the decision to tackle has been made. Don't take it easy! You must go all out.

Mechanics are important. Tacklers should keep their leg unlocked with a slight bend. Then when you get to the ball, extend your leg through it. Make sure you get the ball right on your shoelaces and swing your leg through it.

Give 'Em The Hook

The proper slide should make baseball managers proud -- it's a hook, on your side, with the extension of your leg through the ball. It's like a baseball slide. The only difference is you don't slide straight through. In soccer, you're running at an angle and sliding, hoping to land on your side. Then you try to swing your leg across and hook the ball.

It requires precision and resolution. Don't just put your foot out there, hoping the ball will hit you as your opponent trips over you. Make sure you swing through it. Try to clear it, or try to kick it away from him.

Get The Ball

This is most important. If you don't get the ball. Your goalkeeper will likely be picking the ball out of the back of the net in a matter of moments. Make sure you get the ball. You can get the ball first and then go through the player

Or don't. Tackling doesn't require a defender to strip the ball from his opponent. Sometimes just getting in the way is enough. If a guy is running down the wing, he's running full speed, and you know at that speed he can't cut it back. You know he is going to cross it. Sometimes if you stick out your leg, you're not going to block it. If you slide and lift your leg, you can block the pass.

Control Your Emotions

Professional fouls are part of the game, mere moves in a chess match. And although players can become frustrated and tempers can flare, one should never take it out on an opponent.

It's important that you control your emotions. Never go out to hurt somebody because you're looking to be thrown out of the game, and that's stupid. Make sure you keep your foot down when sliding -- you don't ever want to lift your foot.