



FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT MODEL



ADOPTING ROOKIE TACKLE® INTO YOUR LEAGUE

INTRODUCTION

USA Football's Contact game category is part of USA Football's Football Development Model (FDM). Within this development stage, athletes participate in full-field tackle football with 6 to 11 players per side.

USA Football believes that a high-quality transition from other game types, such as the small-sided game of Rookie Tackle® to full-field tackle is essential to player development and a positive experience driven by high quality coaching.

The goal of this game type in the Football Development Model is to introduce players to more advanced fundamentals from what they learned in Non-Contact, Limited Contact and/or Rookie Tackle game types. The game becomes a bit more competitive with new elements and recommended rules for experienced players.

Rookie Tackle builds upon the skills gained in Non-Contact and Limited Contact football as part of a player pathway in alignment with the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee's American Development Model (ADM).

By playing Rookie Tackle, coaches and administrators are able to:

- Increase a team's coach-to-player ratio
- Play and teach in an age-appropriate space
- Decrease the cognitive load on individual players
- Lessen the number of players on the field for more individual attention
- Focus on skill development
- Foster a fun, positive experience for young players

These are just some of the factors that allow coaches to dedicate greater attention to skill development, especially newly introduced skills of blocking, defeating blocks and tackling. A greater focus on teaching these aspects of the sport advances young players' understanding and learning of foundational skills, helping them transition to 11-player tackle and regulation-sized fields at the next stage.

USA Football's Rookie Tackle pilot season in 2017, encompassed 10 youth leagues that changed the game type in their youngest contact age division from 11-player to Rookie Tackle. Whether that division is age- or grade-based depended on the community as did the decision to play Rookie Tackle within a single-year division or a two-year division. This model has been the most efficient way for leagues to incorporate

Rookie Tackle into a player pathway and offer the innovative game type to its families. By adding the Rookie Tackle game type to your league, you invite athletes with a game type that best fits their physical abilities and aptitude. The steps toward mastery are not increased by earlier introduction, but by introducing young athletes to the best version of the sport for them based on their physical and cognitive abilities to learn fundamental movement and football skills.

The process of introducing a new game type requires both quality coaching and parent communication. Once you decide to adopt Rookie Tackle, inform your coaches and parents. Keep everyone updated on what game formats will be offered ahead of time to ensure a smooth registration process and that parents are well aware of your commitment to provide fun and positive football experiences.

Single age/grade groupings have shown to be an easier process as the players moved up from flag to Rookie Tackle, as many players brought little or no experience from 11-player versions of the game. Through this process, athletes and parents were able to learn the Rookie Tackle rules and gain the positive benefits of the Football Development Model as the only form of tackle they have ever played.

Leagues that offered two-year age/grade bands for game types experienced a different challenge. Those leagues involved families that were part of an existing 11-player football option in the previous season. Playing Rookie Tackle should never be viewed as a "step back," but instead as a forward-thinking investment in the skill development of each child – a step that will better prepare them for long-term development and enjoyment of the sport along with the myriad benefits of sport participation.

With both the returning and new parent groups for this two-year age/grade band, important areas to address are:

- New rules
- What they will experience and see in the new game type
- The benefits of the Football Development Model
- Why the league adopted this model for player development
- How this will affect first-year players
- How this will affect returning players

IMPLEMENTING NEW GAME TYPES

Understanding why you should adopt new game types is just the start. Reach out to your Regional Manager to learn how you can access more resources in 2021.

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