



# **TACKLEBAR™**

## **Guidebook**



<https://tacklebar.com>



### **What is TackleBar® Football?**

TackleBar Football is a safer approach to the game that preserves the tradition and spirit of the sport. Players wear traditional football equipment, plus a TackleBar harness that holds two foam bars across the lower back. The defender must track and engage the ball carrier with proper form tackling technique, then wrap the ball carrier and rip the bar from the harness. With this approach, players stay on their feet rather than taking the ball carrier to the ground.

### **TackleBar for Games**

TackleBar Football is an ideal progression between flag football and tackle football. Football associations across America are now adopting TackleBar Football as a game format. It integrates seamlessly with programs, and requires no adjustments other than use of the TackleBar harness to keep contact at safer levels while providing players a real football experience. USA Football is recommending associations create a development model whereby players progress from no pads to eventual full contact as they move towards high school age. We believe TackleBar can be used as a great bridge to help associations serve that transition. TackleBar Football allows players to have the real football experience and learn proper fundamentals in a safe and competitive atmosphere.

### **TackleBar for Practice**

TackleBar can also be used for practice drills, scrimmages, and passing leagues. It teaches players to utilize proper fundamentals without putting their body through the wear and tear of live tackling. As high schools are facing more restrictions on contact, there is a need for tools to teach game-speed tackling. The feedback from our high school coaches using TackleBar tell us their teams become sharper, more decisive tacklers. The placement of the removable bars on the back of the TackleBar harness is intentional. It teaches the basic fundamentals of a tackle:

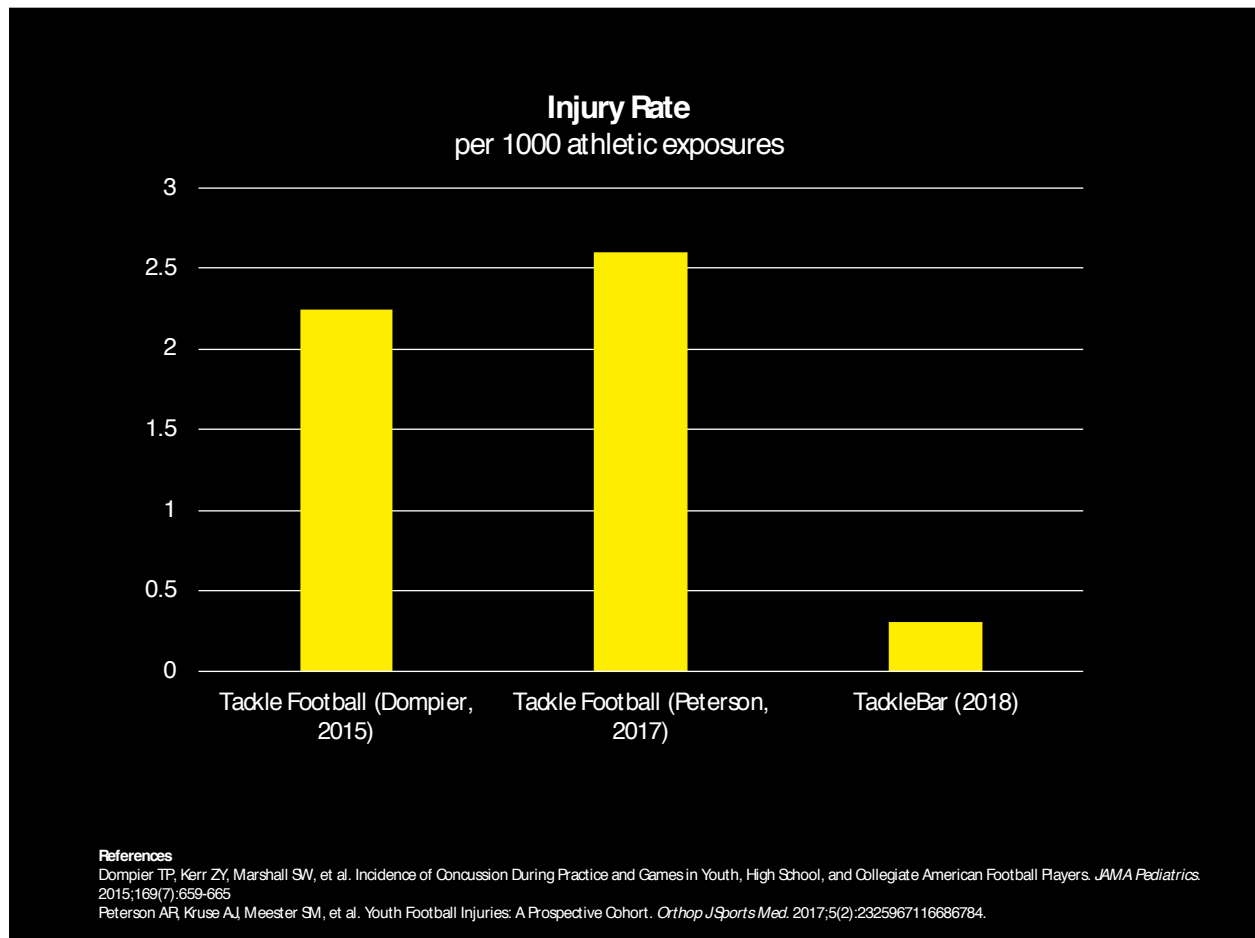
Head up → Track near hip → Near foot/near shoulder strike → Wrap → Rip.

We have sought input from tackling specialists in this field to ensure TackleBar is a tool that coaches can use to teach good defensive fundamentals. This is the closest simulation of live tackling without putting players through that wear and tear.

## TackleBar Benefits:

- Decreases injuries by reducing big hits and high impact collisions
- Teaches proper tackling technique
- Ideal transition between flag football and tackle football
- Increases participation, eases player and parent concern.

TackleBar Football dramatically reduces injuries by taking the big hits out of the game. A 2018 independent safety study shows youth TackleBar athletes are experiencing seven times fewer injuries than youth tackle players.



## **TackleBar Philosophy**

We believe TackleBar football is the ideal transitional game that will best prepare players for tackle football. Players can learn the fundamentals of the game and begin developing specific skills in a fun and safe environment.

Flag football has traditionally been the default alternative to tackle football. We believe TackleBar football is the best alternative to tackle and preferred over flag for the following reasons:

### **Flag Football vs. TackleBar Football:**

- While flag football is a great introductory game, long-term it can teach kids poor habits. Kids are taught to run with their heads down, chasing a dangling flag. They are not taught proper body positioning, or the critical safety emphasis of always keeping their head up.
- It is always safest to play this game with protective equipment.
- Flag has no line play and does not utilize a traditional football playbook which creates a less realistic game and leaves kids unprepared if they choose to transition to tackle football at an older age.
- Flag football is not inclusive to the bigger kids and tends to highlight only the fast, skilled players.

### **Tackle Football vs. TackleBar Football:**

More and more medical research and evidence is recommending children wait until after the age of 12 to begin playing tackle football. This guidance leaves youth football associations with limited options. Fortunately, TackleBar has emerged as a comparable alternative that allows football associations to continue living out their missions and offering the same larger experience that has been part of the rich history and benefit of this game.

- TackleBar Football dramatically reduces injuries by taking the big hits out of the game. A 2018 independent safety study shows youth TackleBar athletes are experiencing seven times fewer injuries than youth tackle players (*Injury Rates in Football and Football Alternatives, 2018, Samadani, Toninato, et al.*)
- In TackleBar, the positions and rules are the same as in tackle football, without the tackle.
- The “Wrap and Rip” method teaches defenders how to properly pursue and engage the ball carrier with good tackling form
- No weight restrictions on ball carriers in TackleBar Football, which doesn’t limit the big, athletic kids.

## **Implementing TackleBar Football**

*This is intended to be a general guide and rulebook, with the understanding that local leagues, clubs, and associations will provide the detailed implementation that's appropriate for their communities.*

### **Steps for introducing TackleBar football to your league**

1. Identify age/grade group to play TackleBar Football. Determine if this is an in-house league or if you need to recruit neighboring teams/associations to participate.
2. If you do not have an existing association, and want to set up your own, visit <https://playtacklebar.com> to join the TackleBar Football League (TFL). TFL provides all the infrastructure (insurance, registration, scheduling app, coaches certification, etc.) you need for getting a league up and running.
3. Select on field and roster size.
4. Required protective equipment includes:
  - a. Helmet and mouth guard
  - b. Shoulder pads (TackleBar shoulder pads recommended)
  - c. TackleBar harness (bars)
  - d. Padded football pants are optional
  - e. Leagues that already have the necessary protective equipment (helmet, shoulder pads, and padded pants) may elect to continue distributing this equipment to their players.
  - f. For those players or leagues who need to purchase harnesses, shoulder pads or helmets please refer to <https://Tacklebar.com>
5. Distribute Parent/Player information letters and marketing material found at <https://tacklebar.com>.
6. League registration. Be sure to communicate equipment plan and responsibilities to your registrants.
7. Split age/grade number to create teams.
8. Ensure your coaches and referees are trained on the TackleBar Rule Recommendations, found in this guidebook.
9. Game on!!! Please continue all the other intangibles you do to grow and enrich the lives of our young athletes.

## **Wrap and Rip:**

The TackleBar harness teaches proper form tackling technique and skill development. The defender must track and engage with proper tackling technique while wrapping the ball carrier and ripping a bar from the harness. Players are able to practice proper breakdown, body positioning, and engagement. It's a true simulation of live tackling without putting players through the wear and tear of full contact.

**Breakdown**



**Wrap**



**Rip**



## INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

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The TackleBar™ harness is worn around the waist/lower mid-section.

**1**  
Secure Velcro™ fastener across the front of the body just below the navel, ensuring the TackleBar logo is upright.



**2** Simultaneously tighten **top** two straps and ensure the excess lengths are even. **3** Repeat for **bottom** two straps.

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## **TackleBar Rule Recommendations**

### **I. General Game Rules:**

#### **a. Safe Contact Recommendations:**

- i. TackleBar harness must be worn snug to the body. Loose straps may allow the entire harness to shift or slip while the defender is attempting to rip off the bar.
  - ii. Excessive contact penalties (personal foul) can be called for failure to control contact and comply with these safe contact guidelines.
- b. Coin toss at the beginning of each game. The winner chooses to kick or to receive. The other team chooses the direction they want to defend. Switch both at half.
  - c. If a team is short on kids, coaches can agree to play with whatever the number of players available.
  - d. Full size, 100-yard field is preferred. Younger players and/or smaller on-field roster sizes may elect to play on smaller field size (typically 80-yard long x 40 yds wide)
  - e. Point scoring:
    - i. Touchdown = 6
    - ii. Extra point = 1 (No kicking. Ball is placed on the 3-yard line and must be run or passed into the end zone)
    - iii. Safety = 2
  - f. There are no requirements for touches. However, every player should be given the opportunity to play a skill position and touch the ball throughout the year.
  - g. A balance should be maintained between a spirit of fairness and competitiveness. Standout and dominant players should not be the only ones to carry the ball in a game.

### **II. Equipment:**

- a. Helmets, shoulder pads, padded pants (optional but recommended), TackleBar harness, mouth guard.
- b. Jerseys must be tucked in at all times.
- c. NO metal spikes or steel tip cleats allowed.



### **III. Game Length:**

- a. Games will consist of 12-minute quarters. Clock is running time, with the exception of the last 2 minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.
- b. Halftime will be 5 minutes.
- c. 45 second maximum play clock in between plays.
- d. Each team gets 3 timeouts per half.
- e. No overtime in regular season - games may end in a tie.
- f. Overtime in playoffs is sudden death. Coin toss determines who gets the ball first in OT (possession starts at the 25yd line).

### **IV. Offense:**

#### **a. Safe Contact Recommendations:**

- i. No weight restriction for RB/QB.
- ii. No helmet-initiated contact.
- iii. Players may never leave their feet to launch or dive into another player.
- iv. No blocking below the waist.
- v. If a TackleBar or a harness falls off, the ball carrier is down at the spot.
- b. One coach is allowed in the huddle for youth leagues ages 10 and under.
- c. Charging - a ball carrier may NEVER lower their head to run through or charge a defensive player. This is a 15yd unsportsmanlike penalty.
- d. No bar guarding (10-yard penalty from the spot of the foul). This will be penalized even if the defender gets your bar.
- e. Stiff arms are NOT recommended. We're asking defenders to break down and engage in a controlled manner without taking the ball carrier to the ground, if their fighting through a stiff arm they often loose control, which can lead to excessive contact. Stiff arms can also be interpreted as a form of bar guarding.
- f. The center must snap the ball between their legs.
- g. Only one forward pass per play is allowed. That pass must be initiated from behind the line of scrimmage.
- h. All laterals or backward passes are allowed.
- i. A blocker cannot intentionally leave his feet and all blocks must be made above the waist.

- j. Blockers are encouraged to engage with their hands inside the shoulders (rather than their shoulder or body).
- k. One RB/WR in motion is allowed.

## **V. Defense:**

### **a. Safe Contact Recommendations:**

- i. Downing the Ball Carrier:
  - 1. No tackling or throwing players to the ground.
  - 2. No helmet-initiated contact.
  - 3. Players may never leave their feet to launch or dive into another player.
- ii. Wrap and Rip technique is recommended. Defender breaks down, wraps ball carrier, and rips TackleBar- this simulates the latest recommended shoulder tackling technique.
- iii. It is not a penalty if the ball carrier inadvertently goes to the ground during this action. However, contact that deliberately takes the ball carrier to the ground with force may be penalized.
- b. One coach is allowed in the huddle for youth leagues ages 10 and under.
- c. A ball carrier is down when one TackleBar is removed...defensive player should hold bar in air until the whistle blows.
- d. If a ball carrier goes to the ground for any reason they are considered down at the spot.
- e. Defense may only rush as many players as offense has linemen, no loading the box. All defenders are eligible to blitz if the offensive player in possession is outside of the "Tackle Box".
- f. Defensive may bump a receiver only ONCE within the first 5 yards before the ball is in the air.
- g. Fumbles and Interceptions can be advanced at any time.

## **VI. Special Teams:**

### **a. Safe Contact Recommendations:**

- i. No kickoffs. In any kickoff situation, the receiving team takes possession of the ball at its own 25-yard line.
- ii. If punt is elected, there should be no rush and the ball is placed where the punt is caught or where the ball comes to rest if not caught - or - the team can elect to forego the punt play, and it simply becomes the other team's ball 25 yards from the line of scrimmage.

## **VII. Personal Conduct**

- a. Arguing with officials or league directors may result in one of three things:
  - i. Personal foul penalty
  - ii. Requirement to sit for a series of plays
  - iii. Ejection from the game (or league)
- b. Fighting: Any punches thrown will result in ejection and potential ban from the league. Shoving and pushing or other rough physical conduct determined by an official or league director to be malicious will be cause for ejection and potential suspension. If this occurs at or near the end of a game, you may be suspended for the following week.

## **VIII. Penalties/Referees**

- a. Certified referees should be contracted for all games.
- b. Both coaches should consult with the referee pre-game to ensure clarity on appropriate level of contact.
- c. No tackling or throwing players to the ground. In the event of a tackle, a 15-yard excessive contact penalty will be called. Wrap and Rip technique is recommended.  
(Note: It is NOT a penalty if the ball carrier inadvertently falls to the ground during the tackle, however, contact that DELIBERATELY takes the ball carrier to the ground WITH FORCE should be penalized).
- d. If a player gets 2 excessive contact penalties, he will be ejected from the game,
- e. No helmet-initiated contact (15-yard excessive contact penalty).
- f. Players may never leave their feet to launch or dive into another player (15-yard excessive contact penalty).
- g. Ball carrier may NEVER lower their head to run through or charge a defensive player (15-yard unsportsmanlike penalty).

Now, go have fun with your football players!

Enjoy your TackleBar Football experience!

TackleBar Football

<https://tacklebar.com>

[info@tacklebar.com](mailto:info@tacklebar.com)

TackleBar Football League (TFL)

<https://playtacklebar.com>

[info@playtacklebar.com](mailto:info@playtacklebar.com)

## **Appendix A**

### **Handouts and Resources**

The following handouts and resources are available to help with communication and implementation. Please email [info@tacklebar.com](mailto:info@tacklebar.com) to have any of these resources provided to you, or visit <https://tacklebar.com/pages/how-can-i-play-tacklebar-football-in-my-community> to download any of these resources.

1. Board presentation: Provides the background and context for the rest of your coaches and board members.
2. Sample Parent letter: Explains the proactive safety measures your league is taking.
3. Brochure: Provides the what and why of TackleBar Football.
4. TackleBar logo: Jpg file for incorporating into your league's website and/or marketing materials.
5. Social media posts: Jpg file for posting your league's plans for incorporating TackleBar Football.
6. Youth Football Progression Image: Flag → TackleBar → Tackle

## Appendix B

### Practice and TackleBar Drills

#### Sample Practice Outline:

1. Warm Up and Agilities
2. Blocking drills
3. Tackling drills
4. Ball Handling
5. Play Installation
6. Competition / Controlled scrimmage

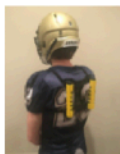
TackleBar teaches the core elements of Shoulder Tackling

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Head Up → Track Near Hip → Near Foot/Near Shoulder Strike → Wrap → Rip bar

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1. Upper Form Tackle = Wear harness around shoulders



Head Up → Track Near Hip → Pec Strike → Upper Cuts → Rip bar

2. Mid Form Tackle = Wear harness around mid-section



Head Up → Track Near Hip → Mid Strike → Wrap → Rip bar

3. Thigh Form Tackle = Wear harness just below waist



Head Up → Track Near Hip → Thigh Strike → Wrap → Rib bar

## **TackleBar Drills: (as found in Coach Anthony Stone's *Back to the Basics Football Drill Manual, Volume 4: Tackling and Turnovers, 2019*)**

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### **1. TackleBar: Wrap & Rip**

Objective: Teaching players to wrap and rip the TackleBar off of the offensive players.

Drill Speed Level: Zombie up to Game-Tempo

Equipment needed: A TackleBar for every player to wear and 8 cones per drill

Set-up: See diagram on the next page

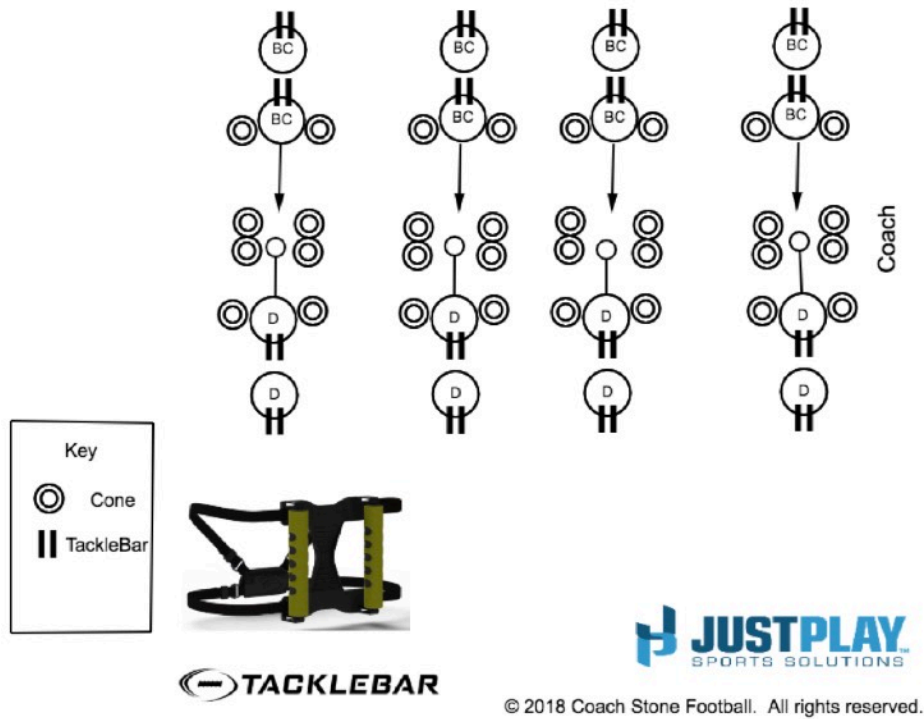
Relativeness to the Game: Teaching players to wrap up a ball carrier will help your team be better in not missing tackles.

Description: You can have the whole football team run this drill or you can have specific team coaches take their group to run this drill. If you do not have enough cones then I recommend using lines. Place two sets of cones 10 to 15 yards apart - one set for the defender and one set for the ball carrier. There will be a 4x4 cone box located in the middle that signifies the ending line. When the coach gives their tackle command the defender and ball carrier will start running at each other. Here is an example of a tackle command, "Ready, Go, Drum Feet, Power Step, Hands in Holster, and Double ii's." Once the defender wraps up the ball carrier the defender will rip off the ball carrier's TackleBar, then they will switch lines after the defender gives back the ball carrier's TackleBar.

Coaching Points:

- Defenders keep their heads up
- Make sure the defenders stay under control when drumming their feet
- Look for good athletic position and hand placement when the defender and ball carrier contact each other
- Look for good tackling progression when the defender wraps up the ball carrier

Diagram:



**Modification:** You can also do this drill with a Near Hip Drill while doing the wrap and rip with a different tackle angle.

## **2. TackleBar: I-Opener**

**Objective:** To teach defenders not to over pursue the ball carrier.

**Drill Speed Level®:** All Levels

**Equipment needed:** 5 Bags, four cones, and a TackleBar for every player.

**Set-up:** See diagram on the next page

**Relativeness to the Game:** Teaching defenders to close and not over pursue the ball carrier when they cut back and wrap up the ball carrier.

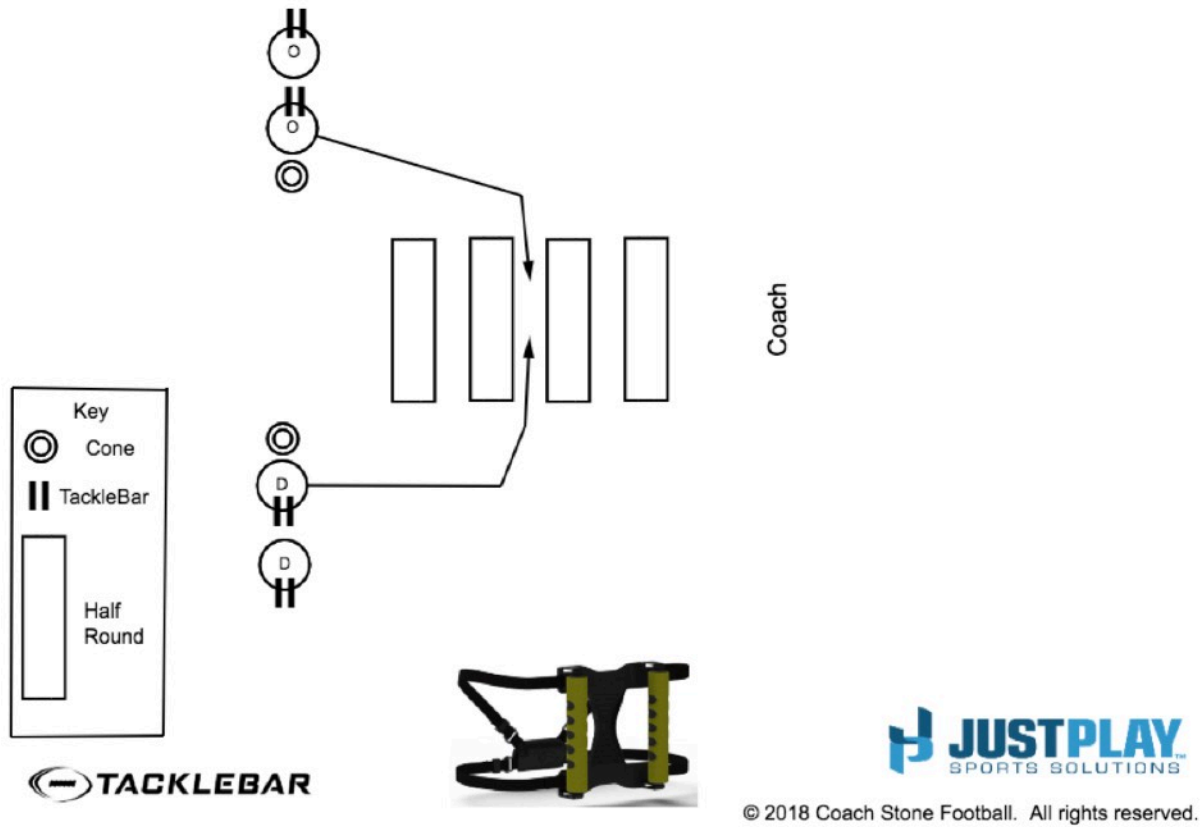
**Description:** Position the defenders at one end and the ball carriers at the other end, facing each other. On the coach's command, the defender will run in front of the bags (manipulations) and the ball carrier. Once the ball carrier commits to a hole and begins to run the defender will fill that hole. The ball carrier will pick the hole the coach instructed them to choose before the drill began. They will run in the bag (manipulation) lanes to turn up into. The defender will attack, fill, stick their foot in the ground, get square, and then wrap up the ball carrier while grabbing their TackleBar. Then they will switch sides and start over.

### **Coaching Points:**

- Defender does not overrun the ball carrier.
- Defenders must stay behind half the ball carrier.
- When the defender is squaring up, the defender needs to continue moving their feet on contact and wrap and grab the TackleBar.



**Diagram:**



**Modification:** You can add a center and quarterback at the end like the picture above or you can put the center and quarterback in the middle and make the area like an offensive line.

### **3. TackleBar: 2 Player Close**

**Objective:** Teaching players to wrap and rip the TackleBar off the offensive players

**Drill Speed Level®:** Game-Tempo

**Equipment needed:** Each player needs a TackleBar and cones to mark the boundaries

**Set-up:** See diagram on the next page

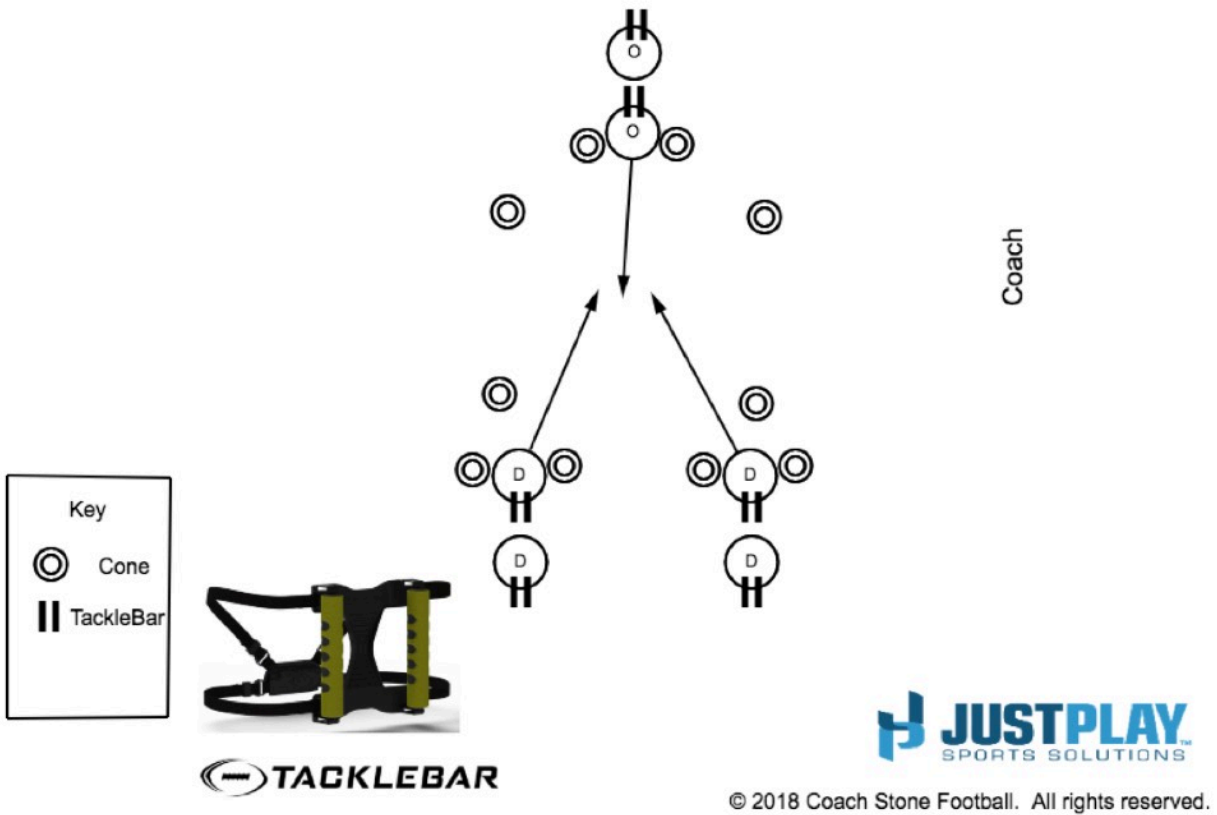
**Relativeness to the Game:** Two defenders tackling one ball carrier is a good sign that your defense will stop the ball carrier in their tracks.

**Description:** Two defensive players will be 5 yards apart from each other facing the ball carrier (rabbit) that is 10 yards away from the coach. The coach will say, "GO" and the ball carrier will try to get past the defenders. The defenders will sandwich the ball carrier by approaching the ball carrier and attacking their inside shoulder. The first defender will wrap the ball carrier up and the second defender will strip the football away.

**Coaching Points:**

- Defenders close the ball carrier and trap them like a sandwich.
- Defenders should plant with inside same foot, same shoulder.
- Defenders wrap up the ball carrier.

**Diagram:**



**Modification:** Have the first defender come in and wrap the ball carrier up by grabbing the TackleBar and the next defender rips out the football.

#### **4. TackleBar: Stop Tackle**

**Objective:** Teaching defenders the proper body placement when tackling - where their shoulder should be right before they make contact.

**Drill Speed Level**®: Game-Tempo

**Equipment needed:** Every player wears a TackleBar, each group has 6 cones

**Set-up:** See diagram on the next page

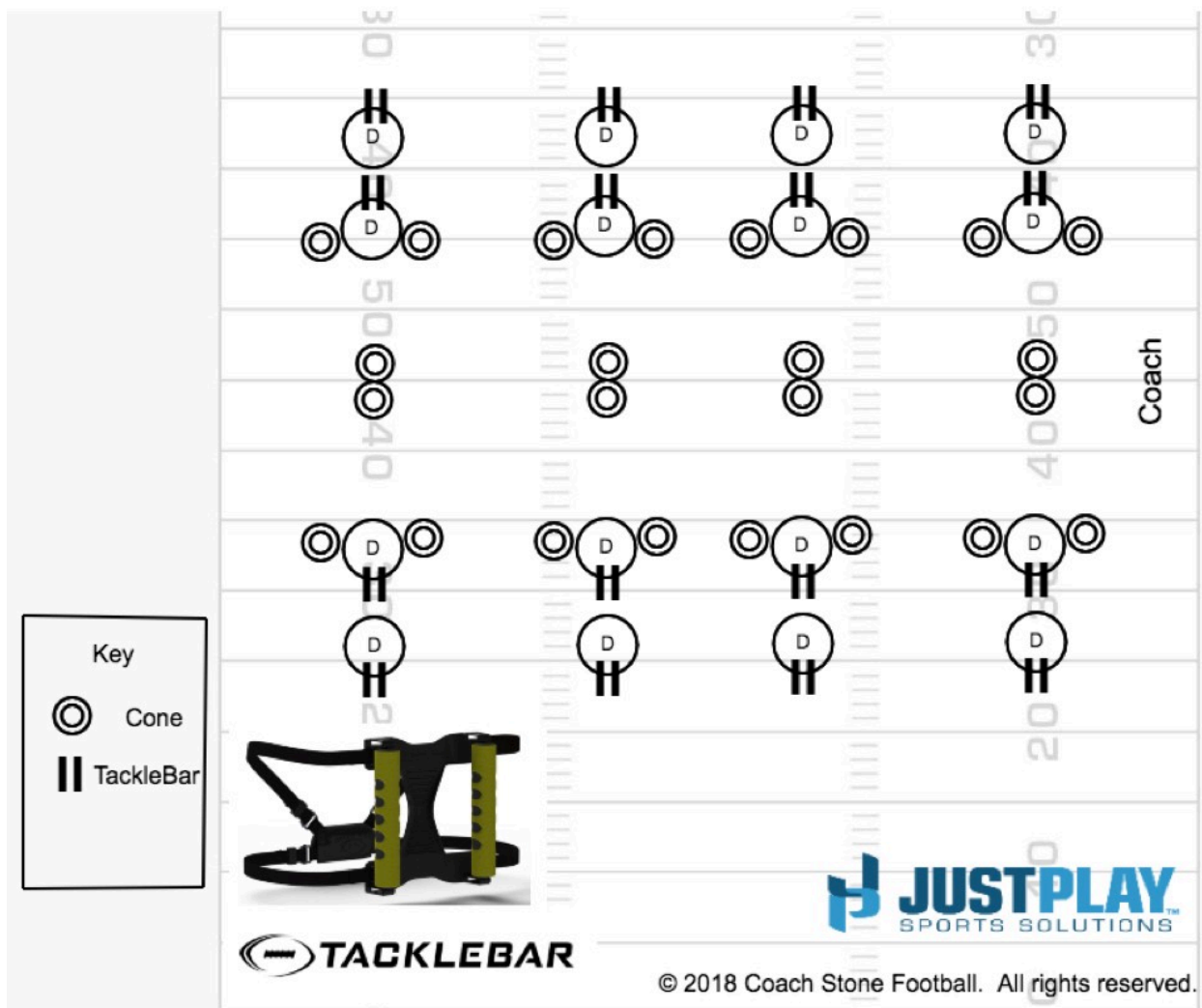
**Relativeness to the Game:** Teaching all of your defensive players to be in the right place at the right time will lead to an effective team.

**Description:** You could run this drill with your whole football team or break off into teams. Coaches can each take a groups and work on this drill with them. If there aren't enough cones then use the lines. Place two cones for each defender's start point - they are 20 yards apart and then place two cones 8 yards away from each defender - located in the middle as an ending line. The coaches will give their tackle commands and both defenders will start running at each other. For example, "Ready, Go, Drum Feet, Power Step, Hands in Holster." Once the defenders stop at the cone in the middle then the two defenders switch sides.

#### **Coaching Points:**

- Defenders are keeping their heads up
- There should be no contact in this drill whatsoever
- Defenders stay under control when drumming their feet
- Look for good athletic position and hand placement when they are frozen
- Don't place the cones too close to each other so the defenders don't run into each other.

## Diagram:



## Modification:

- Coach can add the Whole Tackle by placing the two cones in the middle 2-3 yards apart. Make sure the defenders don't run into each other and that they are able to finish and drive for 5 yards.
- Coach can add the Angle Tackle instead of just the straight on tackle.

## **5. TackleBar: Contact Tackle (one foot)**

**Objective:** Teaching defenders the proper hand placement while making an above the waist tackle.

**Drill Speed Level®:** Zombie

**Equipment needed:** Four cones, every player wears a TackleBar, and the ball carrier has a football

**Set-up:** Make a 2-foot by 2-foot box for the ball carrier and defender to be in

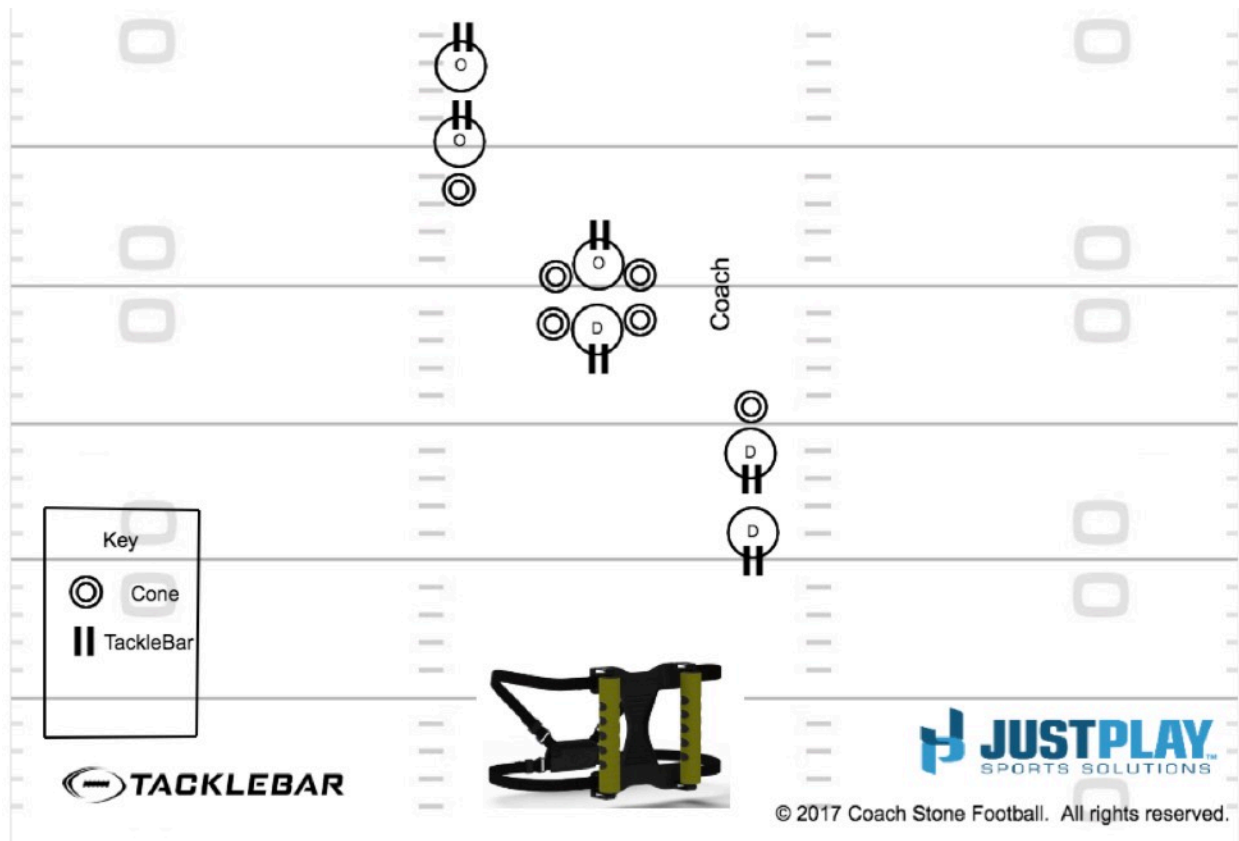
**Relativeness to the Game:** If your players are taught the proper footwork on how to stay low with their head up while tackling it will help your defense wrap up the ball carrier every time they hit them.

**Description:** The ball carrier and the defender are going to be one step from each other inside this little 2 x 2 box. When the coach says, "GO" the defender will power step and wrap up the ball carrier that is acting like a zombie and take the tackle bars off the ball carrier. After that the next player in line will go. Make sure you have more than one group going at a time and make the defender the ball carrier once the drill is over.

### **Coaching Points:**

- Defenders head up
- When the defender takes their power step make sure it is not bigger than a 6 inch step
- Look for their hands to grab the TackleBar and rip them off the ball carrier

**Diagram:**



**Modification:** The coach can make the box a little bigger. This would allow them to teach defender to take more than just the first step in wrapping up the ball carrier. I recommend increasing the drill speed level to Game-Tempo.

## **6. TackleBar Choice Tackle**

**Objective:** Teaching defensive players to fill the gap and tackle the ball carrier by reading the gap.

**Drill Speed Level**®: Game-Tempo

**Equipment needed:** At least four footballs, 6 Cones, two tech bags it is like I-Opener, and one player to be a rabbit (ball carrier)

**Set-up:** See diagram on the next page

**Relativeness to the Game:** If your defense can fill read fits and tackle the ball carrier in the hole then your team won't be giving up a lot of rushing yards.

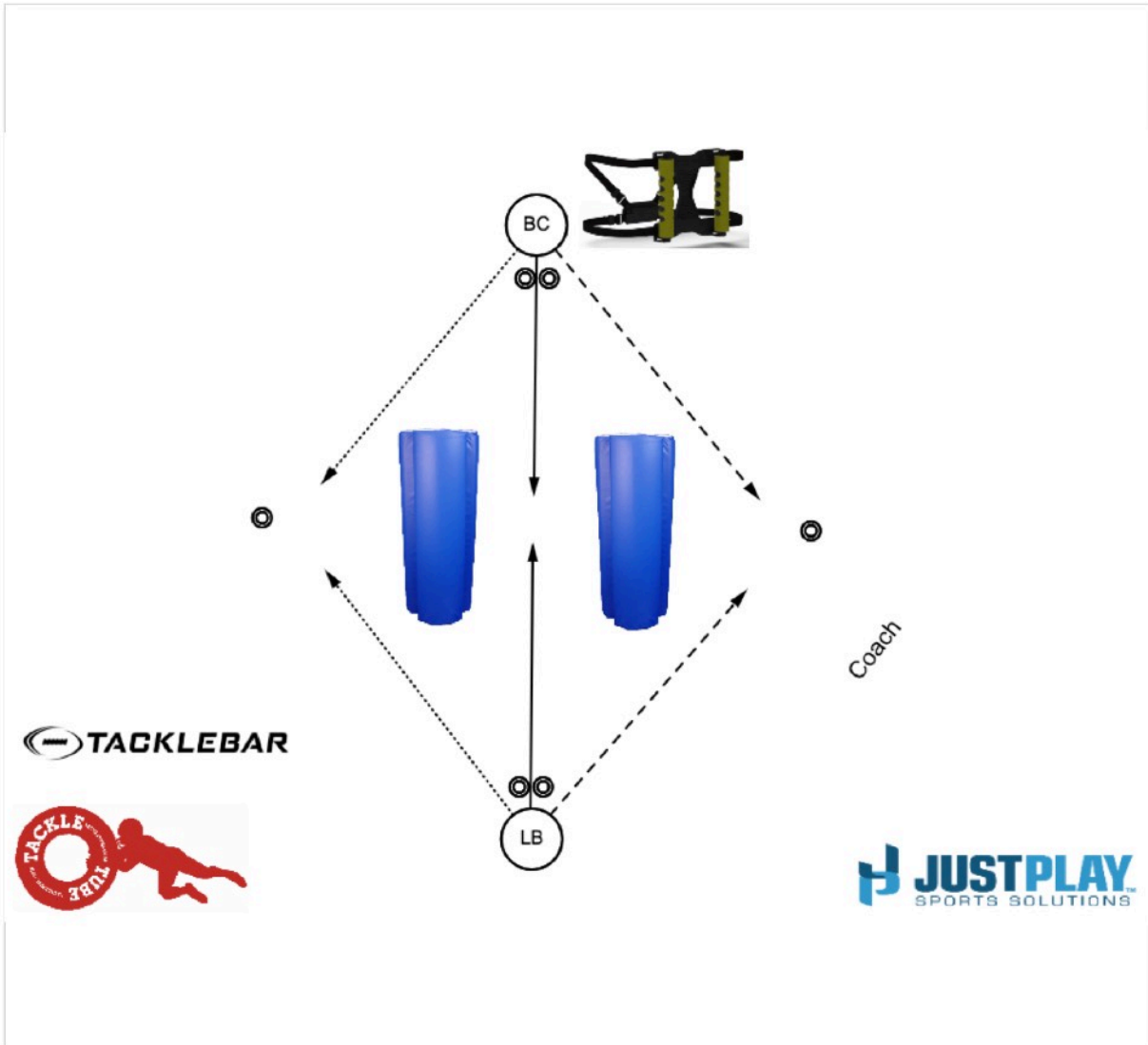
**Description:** This drill is like I-Openers where the ball carrier is 5 yards from the bags. The defender will be 5 yards away also. The coach will tell the ball carrier which gap to read through and the defender will wait until the ball carrier starts to run on the coach's command. The defender will run to the gap the ball carrier is running towards and before they meet the defender will drum their feet, take their power step, make their double ii's, and grab the TackleBar on the ball carrier. Once the defender rips off the TackleBar they will both get out of the drill and switch sides. The defender will help the ball carrier put the TackleBar back on. The ball carrier will give the football to the defensive player that will now be the offensive player.

### **Coaching Points:**

- Make sure the defender is drumming their feet, power stepping, and making their double ii's to grab the TackleBar.
- Make sure the defensive players are not over pursuing the ball carrier
- Make sure the defender is in the same hole as the ball carrier
- Make sure the defender is low and in good athletic position, not standing up while wrapping up the ball carrier



**Diagram:**



**Modification:** If you want more players to get more reps then I recommend that you add more gaps and add another linebacker and possible a fullback.