



When should slide tackles be allowed on children?

2.8 million children play football in England. Every year, 1 in 25 of them, that's 70,000 children, will suffer a serious injury. That makes football more of a risk than Rugby. A staggering 25% of those injuries are the result of slide tackling alone.

Children's bones are more porous than adult bones, which are well calcified and hard. Children are more prone to fractures because of their porosity and because their ligaments are stronger than their bones. It is the reverse in adults. Adults suffer sprains while children suffer fractures.

Side-on the most dangerous

Although FIFA have banned tackling from behind, the latest research reveals that it is tackling from the side that does the most damage.

Because children's bones are not fully developed, they simply can't withstand the extreme lateral forces of a side-on slide tackle. Knees and ankles are articulated to bend forwards and backwards but a side-on tackle bends and twists the joints sideways, splintering and shattering children's growing bones.

Our players at most risk

Most slide tackle injuries happen in League matches rather than training. Because teams in the Respect League play 60 matches a season, more than in any other League in the country, they are at the most risk. If we allowed slide tackling we could expect around 10 of our children to suffer serious bone and ligament damage every season.

Action to protect our children

Our first responsibility is to the wellbeing of the children in our care. Consequently, no slide tackling will be allowed in any Respect League game from U7s to U12s. A free kick will be given in every instance (direct U7s-U10s; indirect U11s-U12s).

Slide tackling from U13s

Slide tackling is part of the game and, executed well, is a fantastic skill. Even though some players are capable of safe slide tackling at a young age, most cannot. Even those that can often get it badly wrong. It only takes one mistake to snap a leg bone. But as children develop, so does their bone strength and their physical control.

Just as the sizes of the ball, the goals, the pitch and the team are gradually increased and children are gradually introduced to offside, the back pass rule and indirect free kicks, Respect League players will be introduced the the slide tackle at U13s.

But, before that happens, all U13s coaches will take part in a masterclass to learn how to teach safer slide tackling.

A last resort

But, while safer slide tackling can and should be taught, it is still a last resort. Slide tackles are made by players who are out of position and are desperate to win the ball back.

It's much better to coach defenders to have better positioning. Also, if a player attempts a slide tackle and fails, they are lying on the ground and are out of the game. Leading coaches would tell young players to stay on their feet and to stay in the game.