

CHANGING THE LEGAL

TACKLE HEIGHT





WORKING HARD TO MAKE RUGBY SAFER

In May of 2023, the World Rugby Council unanimously approved a recommendation that unions participate in trials of a lowered tackle height in community rugby. World Rugby ratified the original March 2023 recommendations, to follow the evidence and lower the permitted tackle height in the community game to below the base of the sternum. This has statistically been shown to be the safest place to make a tackle for both tackler and ball carrier.

The trials give unions the freedom to adapt the laws within their own jurisdiction, with the primary aim to improve player safety.

SA Rugby therefore created a Tackle-Height Player Safety Task Team with representatives from coaching, refereeing, medical, women's rugby, strategic transformation and compliance, communications, high performance, scientific research, and schools, to explore this concept. SA Rugby also considered the potential for catastrophic head, neck, and spine injuries in the tackle.

The proposed law changes take all this information into consideration and will address the role of both tacklers and ball carriers in making the game as safe as possible.



⊗ Head and neck contact may be carded

! Above the base of the sternum may be penalized

BELOW THE BASE OF THE STERNUM

✓ Target the belly

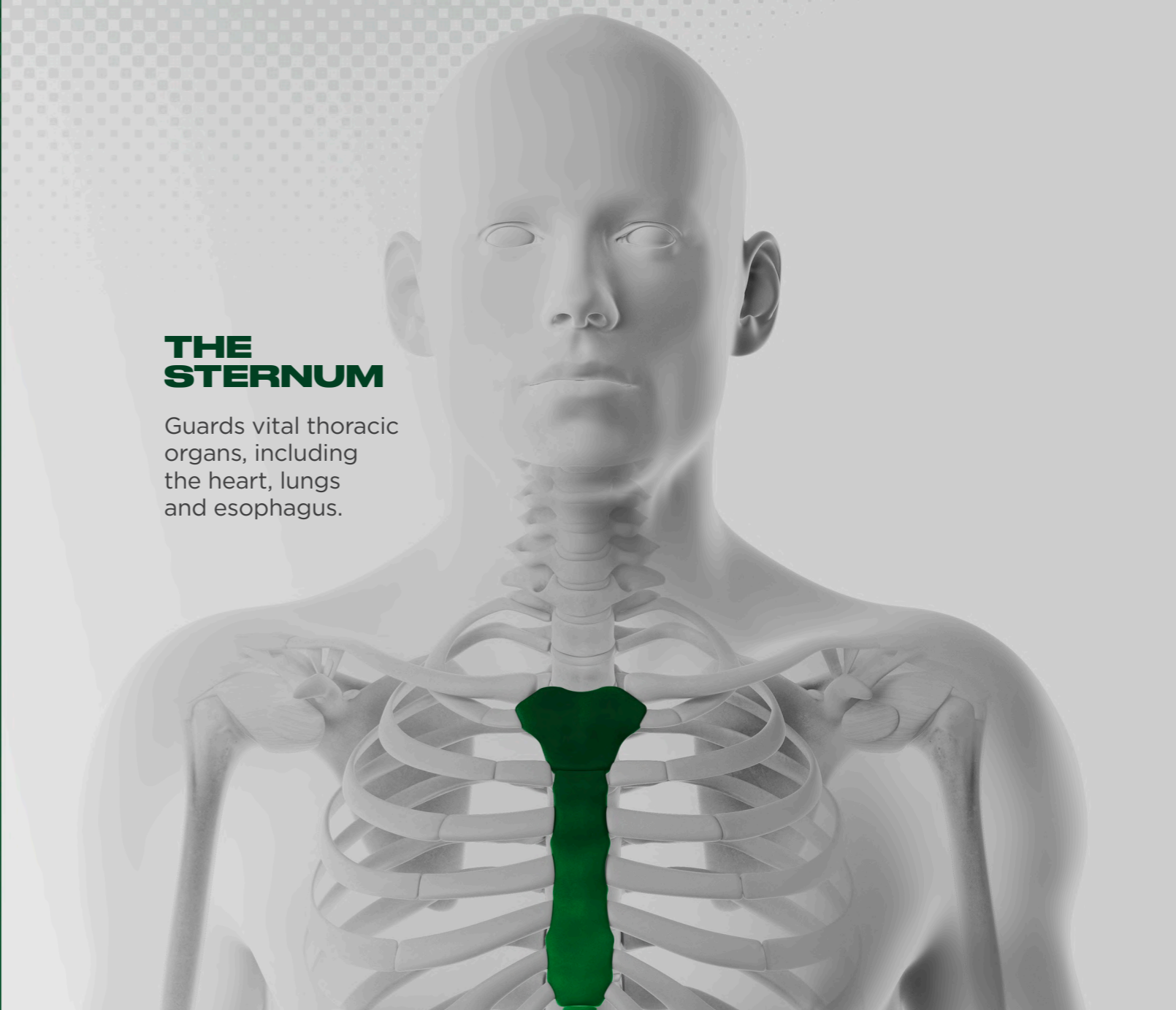
✓ Target the thighs

! Avoid the knees

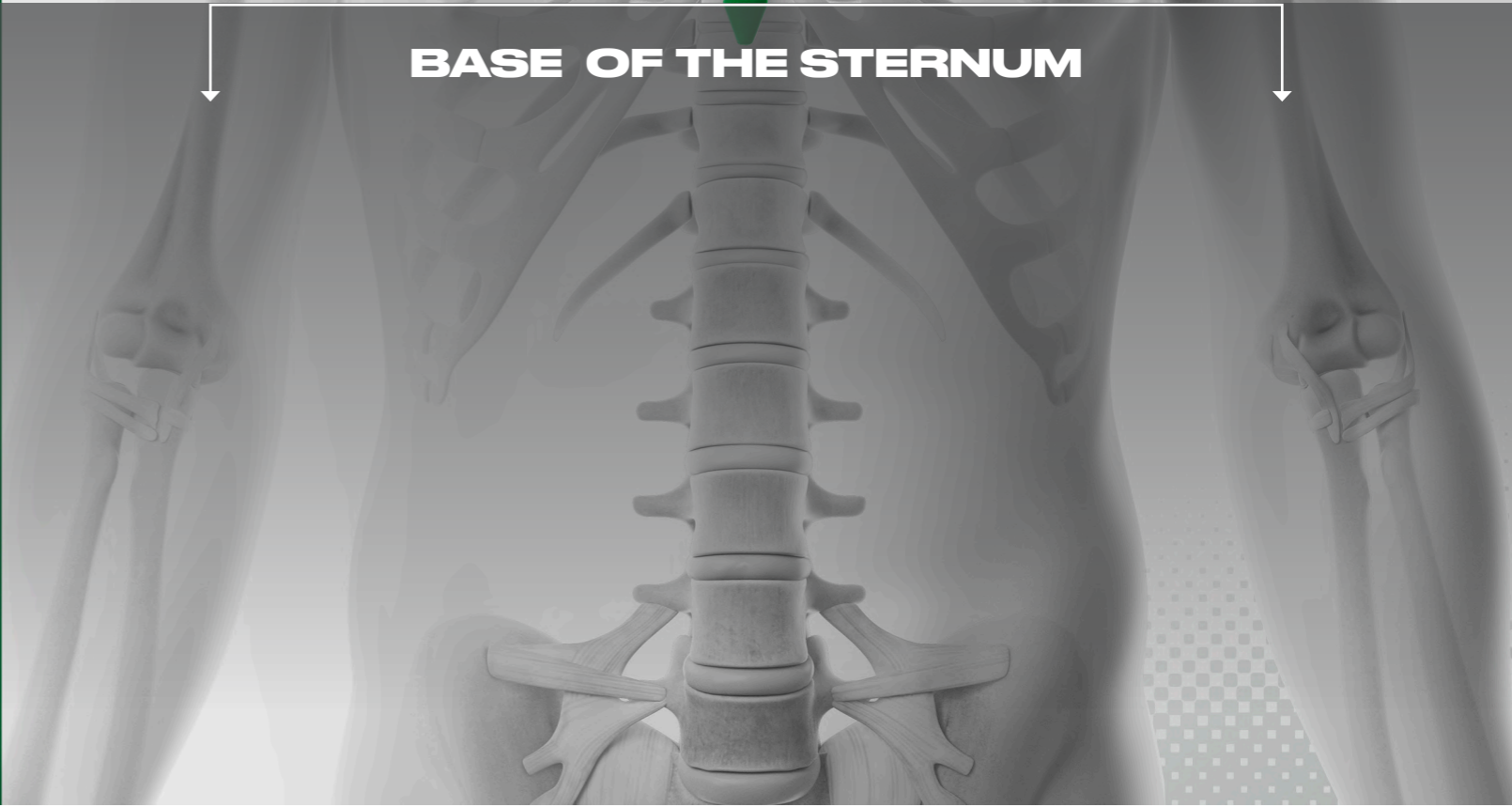
✓

THE STERNUM

Guards vital thoracic organs, including the heart, lungs and esophagus.



BASE OF THE STERNUM





PLAYER WELFARE CONSIDERATIONS

RED ZONE

- Highest danger
- Head-on-head and head-on-shoulder

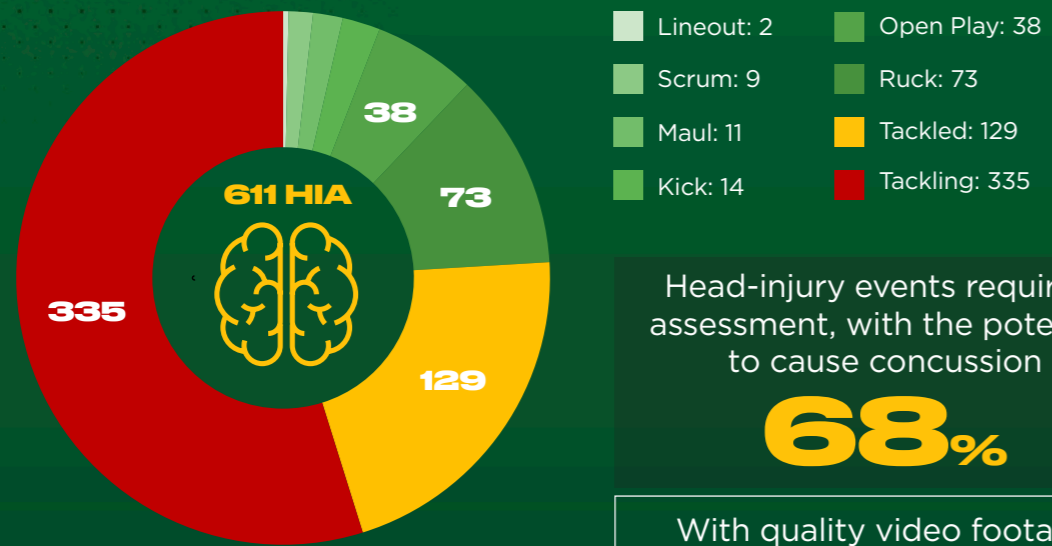
GREEN ZONE

- Lowest danger
- Tackler head to Ball Carrier torso/upper body

ORANGE ZONE

- Medium danger
- Head-on-knee highest risk
- Head-to-hip and head to upper leg are low risk

PHASE OF PLAY/MATCH ACTIVITY THAT CARRIES HIGHEST RISK

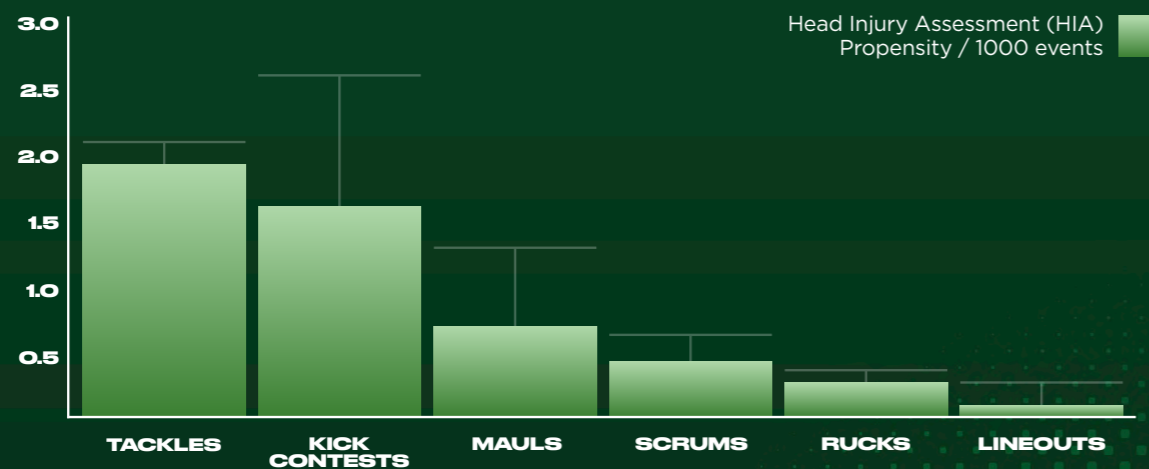
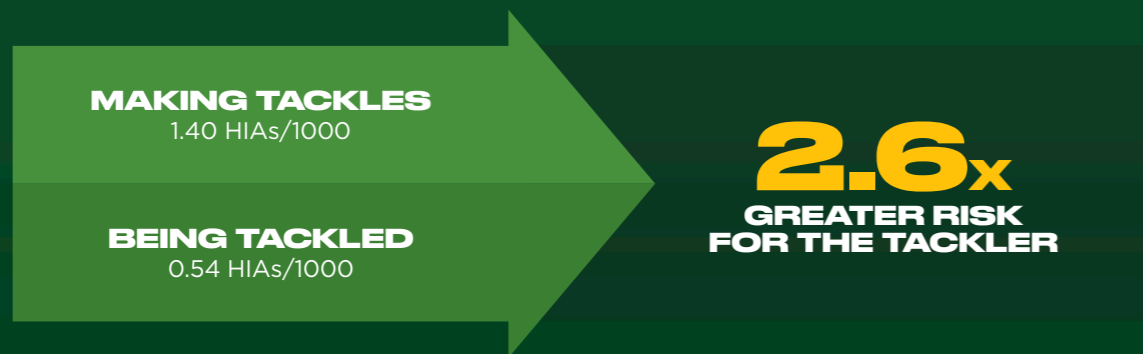


Head-injury events requiring assessment, with the potential to cause concussion

68%

With quality video footage

HIA PROPENSITY (/1000 EVENTS):



BOTH TACKLERS AND BALL CARRIERS SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO AVOID HEAD-TO-HEAD CONTACT.

Most concussive events stem from making and taking tackles, with **tackling** responsible for more than

70% of them.



2.6x greater risk of sustaining a concussion event while **making the tackle** compared to carrying the ball into contact.

THE RATIONALE FOR LOWERING THE LEGAL TACKLE HEIGHT

Our aim is to reduce the risk of concussions for both tacklers and ball carriers.

Tackles above the sternum pose a **4.2** times higher risk of causing concussions to both ball carriers

and tacklers, in contrast to tackles made below the sternum.

For tackles above the sternum, the risk of concussion is **280%** higher for the tackler compared to when they make tackles below the sternum.

SUMMARY "HIGH" VS "LOW" LEGAL TACKLES



THE ACTIONS OF A BALL CARRIER

The ball carrier may brace for contact, but may not run into contact with their body fully bent or horizontal, or with the head lower than the hips, or lead headfirst into contact with an opponent during open play.

This could be described as **"LATE AND LOW"** and may be penalized for contributing towards dangerous play.



TACKLER INTERACTION

T

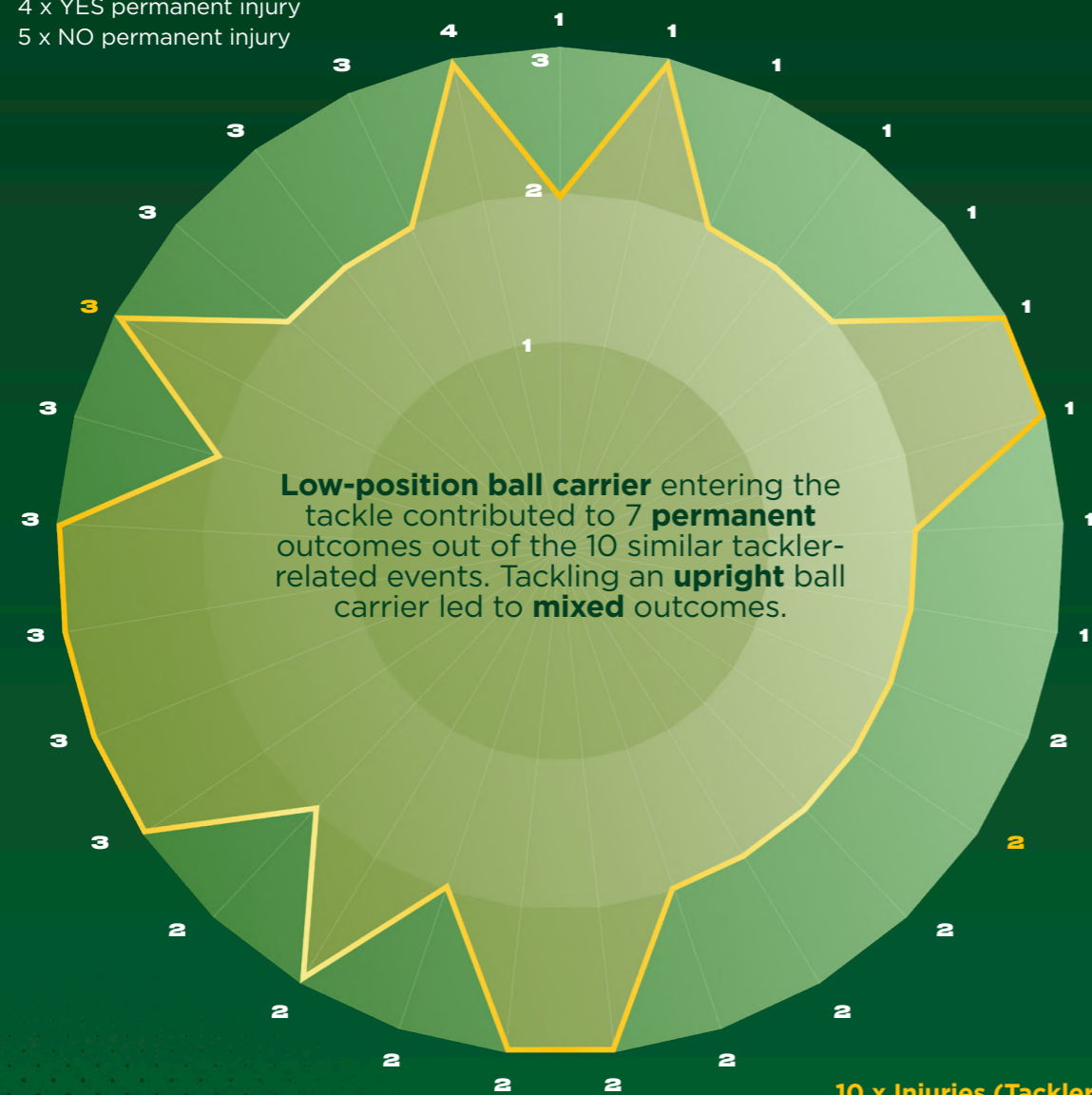
Tackling from the front (Tackler)

Ball carrier's body position when entering the tackle contest, has been flagged as an important risk factor in catastrophic head, neck, and spine injuries for **both** tacklers and ball carriers.

Outer Ring = Ball Carrier Stance
 Not Provided = 1, Low Position = 2
 Upright = 3, Falling/Diving = 4

Inner Rings = Permanent Outcome
 Not Provided = 1, Yes = 2, No = 3

9 x Injuries (Tackler)
Upright Ball Carrier
 4 x YES permanent injury
 5 x NO permanent injury



Low-position ball carrier entering the tackle contributed to 7 **permanent** outcomes out of the 10 similar tackler-related events. Tackling an **upright** ball carrier led to **mixed** outcomes.

10 x Injuries (Tackler)
Low-Position Ball Carrier
 7 x YES permanent injury
 3 x NO permanent injury

BALL CARRIER INTERACTION

BC

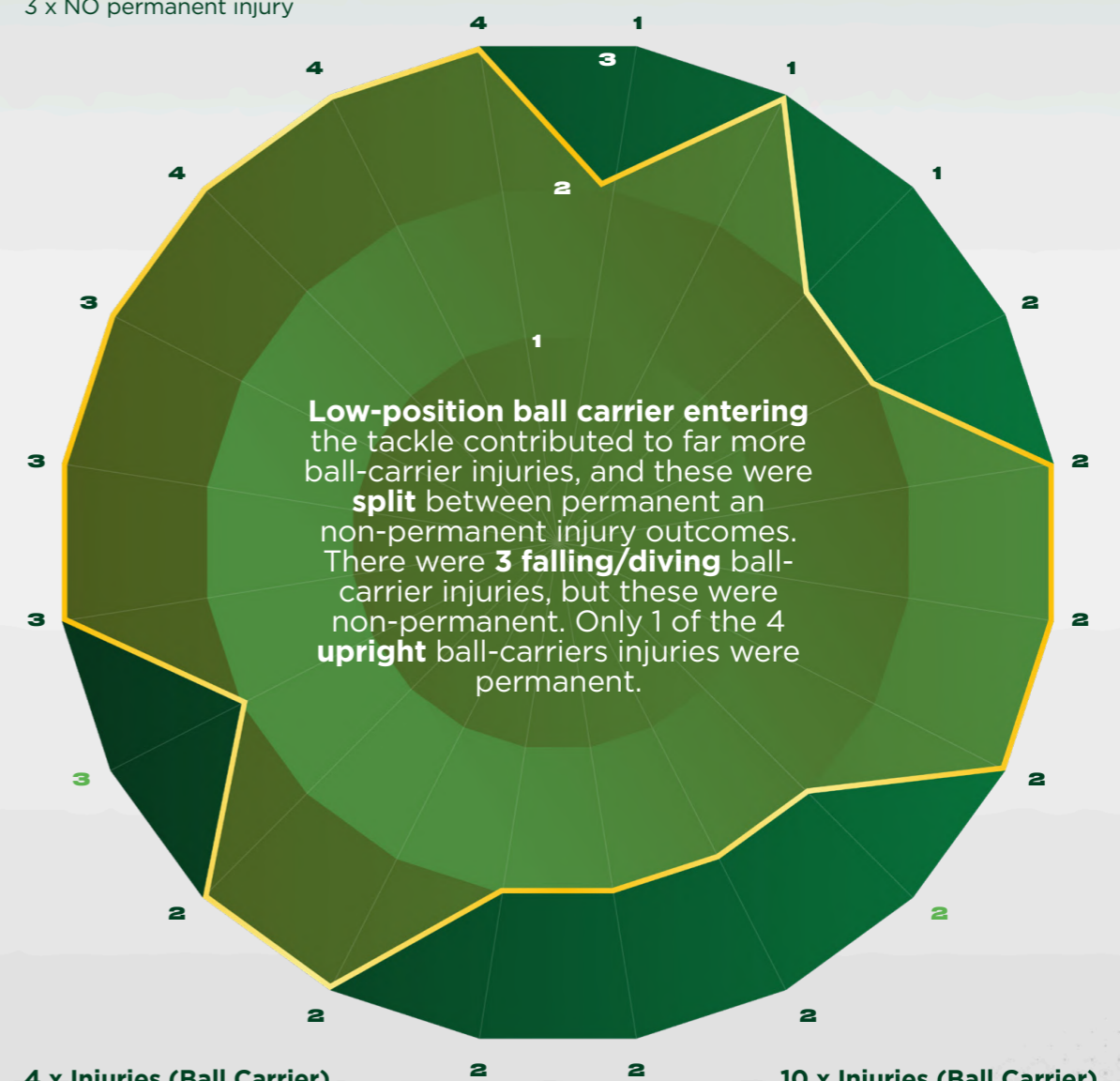
Tackled from the front (Ball Carrier)

Low body position for ball carrier entering the tackle contest increases risk of catastrophic head, neck, and spine injury! Tackling technique and ball carrying technique **must** be prioritised.

Outer Ring = Ball Carrier Stance
 Not Provided = 1, Low Position = 2
 Upright = 3, Falling/Diving = 4

Inner Rings = Permanent Outcome
 Not Provided = 1, Yes = 2, No = 3

3 x Injuries (Ball Carrier)
Falling/Diving Ball Carrier
 3 x NO permanent injury



Low-position ball carrier entering the tackle contributed to far more ball-carrier injuries, and these were **split** between permanent and non-permanent injury outcomes. There were **3 falling/diving** ball-carrier injuries, but these were non-permanent. Only 1 of the 4 **upright** ball-carriers injuries were permanent.

4 x Injuries (Ball Carrier)
Upright Ball Carrier
 1 x YES permanent injury
 3 x NO permanent injury

10 x Injuries (Ball Carrier)
Low-Position Ball Carrier
 5 x YES permanent injury
 5 x NO permanent injury

KEY CHANGES FOR THE TACKLER IN OPEN PLAY

The tackler must bend knees and hips. The tackle must be made below the base of the sternum and above the knees. A tackle may be made below

the knees, but then there must be a CLEAR wrap of the arms around the legs. An attempted wrap will not be acceptable.



All contact above the shoulder line will be managed according to the **Head Contact Process**.

Maximum legal tackle height is below the base of the sternum.

Head and neck contact may be carded



Above the base of the sternum may be penalized



BELOW THE BASE OF THE STERNUM

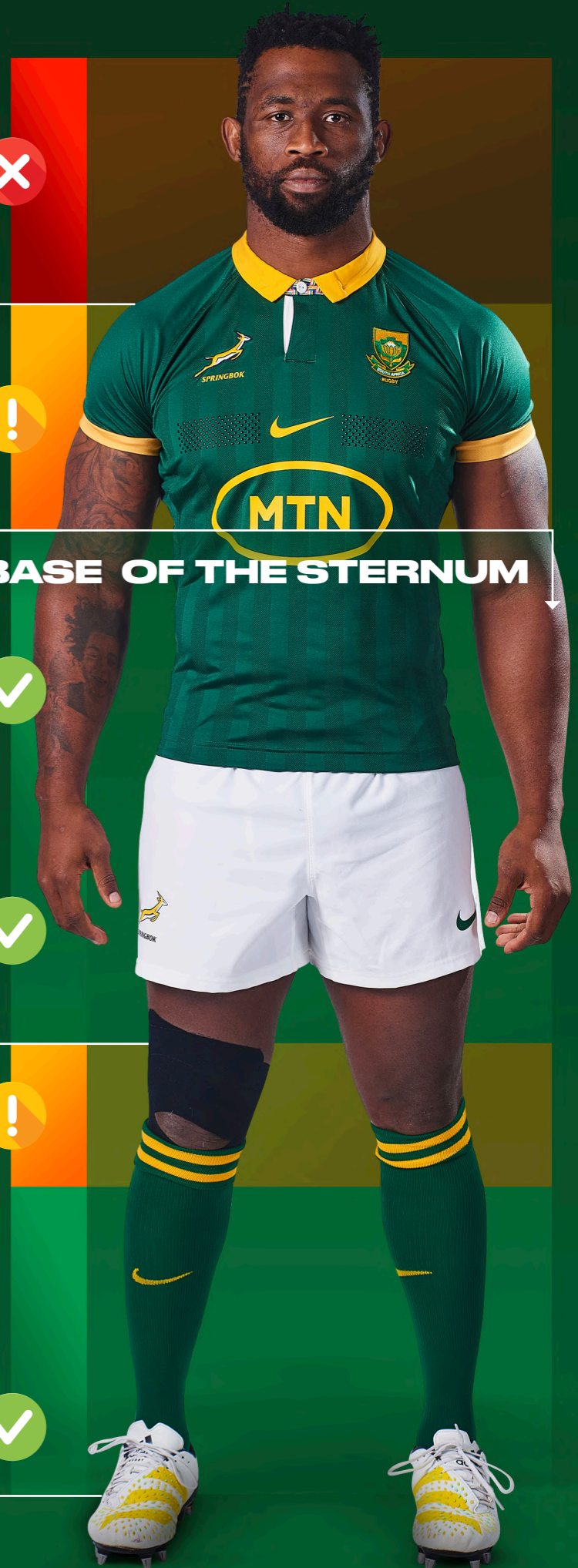
Target the belly



Target the thighs



Avoid the knees



TACKLER "SAFE ZONE"



RED ZONE

GREEN ZONE
The areas where tackles can be made with lowest risk of injury to the **tackler**.

ORANGE ZONE

SANCTIONS

Should the players tackle upwards of the shoulder line, yellow and red-card thresholds will still be applied as per the current laws and Head Contact Process in place, but these will more often be cards as opposed to simply penalty kicks.

Mitigation will still be considered, where the tackler was not solely at fault. In essence, above the shoulder line, yellow and red cards increase; and between the shoulder line and the base of the sternum mainly penalty kicks.



Head and neck contact may be carded

Above the base of the sternum & below the shoulders may be penalized

MAXIMUM LEGAL TACKLE HEIGHT

All contact above the shoulder line will be managed according to the **Head Contact Process**



CRUCIAL TACKLER COACHING TIPS

1 Lower and adjust your height prior to contact.

5 Get the shoulders on, wrap the arms, and pull in tight.

2 Target the “safe zone” between the base of the sternum and mid-thighs.

6 Position the head and neck behind or beside the ball carrier, not in front.

3 Bend at knees, waist, and hips when making contact, maintaining a straight back, keeping your eyes up and looking forward.

7 Low tackles targeting below the knees are permissible only if the player executes a definite wrap, not just an attempted one.

4 Avoid the knees.



KEY CHANGES FOR THE BALL CARRIER IN OPEN PLAY

The ball carrier may brace for contact and lower his/her body position. However, they must avoid running with the body fully bent or horizontal, or

with head lower than the hips, or leading headfirst into contact with an opponent, during open play.

SANCTIONS

The ball carrier may therefore be penalized for leading or contributing to dangerous play, or for not physically providing the tackler with access or sufficient space and options to tackle them safely and legally.



SAFE ZONE



SAFE ZONE

BALL CARRIER "SAFE ZONE"



RED ZONE

GREEN ZONE
The areas where tackles can be made with lowest risk of injury to the **ball carrier**.

SANCTIONS

If the ball carrier's actions prevent the tackler from safely and legally tackling them by denying them space, but without engaging in head-to-head contact with the tackler, this will be sanctioned with a penalty kick.

With direct head-to-head contact, the current **Head Contact Protocols** apply.

BALL CARRIER ACTIONS THAT LEAD TO DANGEROUS PLAY WILL ESCALATE TO YELLOW AND RED CARDS.

Standard mitigation strategies will be applied where ball carriers slip for example, or dip down to catch a low pass, or lose their footing prior to contact being made with the tackler.



DURING OPEN PLAY THE BALL CARRIER MUST AVOID:

- 1 Running with a fully bent or horizontal body.
- 2 Running with their head lower than their hips.
- 3 Leading headfirst into contact.
- 4 Late or low dipping with the head leading into contact.



DURING OPEN PLAY THE BALL CARRIER MUST:

- 1 Keep the "safe zone" accessible to the tackler.



KEY BALL CARRIER COACHING TIPS

1 Attack the space before a face - avoid contact first.

6 Do not run with your body fully bent or horizontal, with your head lower than hips, or lead headfirst into contact during open play.

2 Dip in the knees and hips, lean forward and brace for impact.

7 The "safe zone" **must** be accessible to the tackler!

3 Always keep eyes up and shoulders above the hips.

4 No late or low dipping with the head leading into contact.

5 Drive through the contact with the legs.



ADDITIONAL NOTES: DOUBLE TACKLE

Double tackles and second tacklers (as per law) are permitted in open play, but **must** be made at the base of the sternum or below.

Tackle-assist players (as per law), may attempt to rip the ball provided they are not engaging in dangerous or reckless play, or make direct contact with the head or neck of the ball carrier.

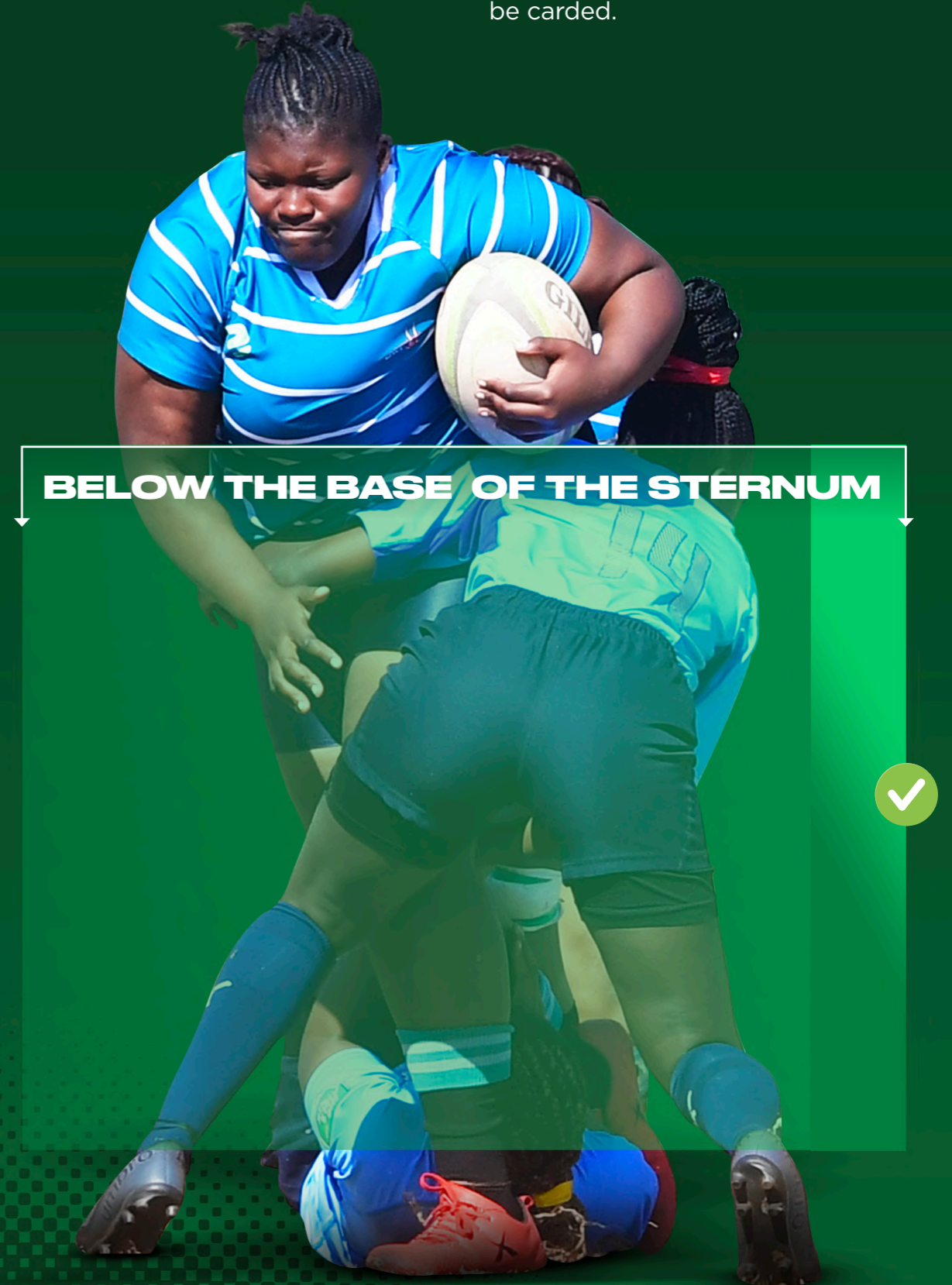


ADDITIONAL NOTES: TACKLER

Tackles in open play must be made at the base of the sternum or below.

Tackles above the sternum in open play, may be penalized.

Tackles in the head and neck area in open play which are dangerous may be carded.



ADDITIONAL NOTES: **BALL CARRIER**

The 'safe zone' must be accessible to the tackler.

Ball carrier may not carry the ball into contact with the body fully bent or horizontal during open play, or with head lower than the hips, or lead headfirst into contact.



ADDITIONAL NOTES: **PICK-AND-DRIVE**

The ball carrier may 'pick-and-drive' in a low body position (lower concussion risk).

A latcher may only bind onto the 'pick-and-drive' ball carrier once they have made contact with the defender.

The ball carrier may **not** use the 'cannon-arm' technique to go to ground early and propel themselves forwards into contact.





More information on changing the legal tackle height, parallel law changes to the ball carrier, and practical implementation strategies will be made available from the Coaching Department and Referee Department at SA Rugby, once this process has been formally ratified and approved. Keep an eye out for these upcoming implementation tools.

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