



RETURN TO CONTACT FRAMEWORK

Queensland Rugby League



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OBJECTIVE

The following framework is designed to ensure a safe and progressive return to full-contact rugby league activities for players recovering from injuries. This framework emphasizes gradual progression, injury prevention, and comprehensive rehabilitation to minimize the risk of re-injury.



OVERVIEW

Why the Framework was Developed: The QRL return-to-contact framework prioritises player safety in the injury recovery process. The framework guides players, coaches, and medical staff through stages, from evaluation to reintegration, to reduce re-injury risk, reinforce technique, and restore confidence and performance.

How to Use the Framework: The framework begins following medical clearance to commence gradual return to contact. Players progress through a systematic four stage process involving low level introductory controlled contact training, progressing to tackle technique involving taking and making tackles in standing and ground based positions. Full contact clearance is granted based on specific criteria, ensuring physical and mental readiness.

Stage 1

Strength

Stage 2

Controlled Contact

Stage 3

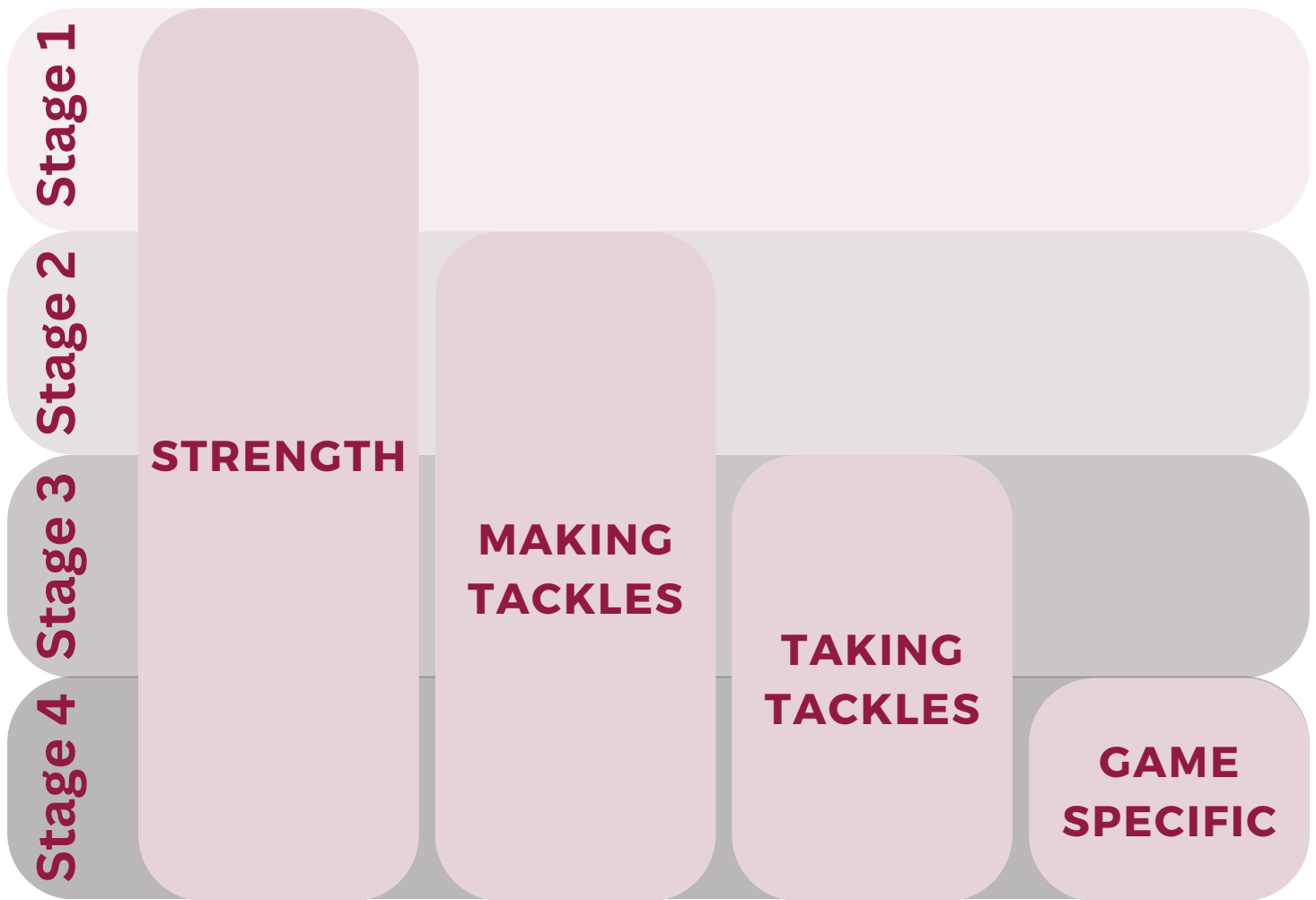
Controlled chaos

Stage 4

Game specific



STAGES



STAGE 1: STRENGTH

Overview

In Stage 1, the rehabilitation process focuses on re-building the strength and range of movement of the injured area. This may include gym based strength progressions for the injured and non-injured areas of the body.

The intensity and complexity of exercises increase progressively, challenging the player's range of motion, strength, and overall functionality. Players can engage in sport-specific drills such as passing and catching, depending on the injury.

The gradual progression of exercises aims to restore the player's confidence in their injured area and prepare them for the introduction of contact at the next stage.

Goals of Stage 1

ROM and Strength

Sport specific skills

Preparation for Contact



STAGE 1 DRILLS

Drill Ideas



Stage 1


STRENGTH

- **GYM BASED**
 - **SHOULDER STABILITY - ASSURE THE PLAYER CAN PUSH AND PULL IN ALL DIRECTIONS**
 - **TRUNK AND NECK STRENGTH - MULTI-PLANAR AND ISOMETRIC STRENGTH AND STABILITY**
 - **LOWER BODY STRENGTH - LOWER BODY PUSH, PULL, HINGE IN SINGLE AND DOUBLE LEG STANCE**
- **FIELD BASED**
 - **FALLING AND CATCHING**
 - **PUSH UPS**
 - **GETTING OFF THE GROUND**
 - **SPORT SPECIFIC SKILLS - INJURY DEPENDANT**



STAGE 1: STRENGTH

OUTCOME MEASURES AND GOALS

OUTCOME MEASURE	DESCRIPTION	GOAL	
Strength	Injury dependant. Strength levels are at a point where contact can be introduced.	80% of pre-injury strength	<input type="radio"/>
ROM	Injury dependant. ROM is at a point where contact can be introduced.	90% of pre-injury ROM	<input type="radio"/>
Completed Stage 1 Drills	Can complete all drills in Stage 1.	Stage 1 Complete	<input type="radio"/>



STAGE 2: CONTROLLED CONTACT

Overview

Stage 2 marks the reintegration of controlled tackle technique into the player's training regimen. Tackle technique is introduced and refined through controlled one-on-one drills with a focus on proper form and positioning. The emphasis is on ensuring that players perform safe and controlled tackles without excessive force.

Stage 2 also builds on the strength progressions from Stage 1, and introduces lower body power exercises to the return to contact program.

Feedback and corrections are provided to players to refine their technique.

Stage 2 is a critical phase in the rehabilitation process, as it bridges the gap between functional rehabilitation and contact readiness. Players gradually return to team practices, initially participating in modified contact drills.

Goals of Stage 2

Introduce Making Tackles

Confidence in controlled contact drills

Strength and Power

Stage 2 includes drills from stage 1



STAGE 2 DRILLS

Drill Ideas



Stage 2

STRENGTH

- **GYM BASED**
 - **UPPER BODY STRENGTH AND FORCE PRODUCTION**
 - **TRUNK AND NECK STRENGTH**
 - **LOWER BODY STRENGTH**
 - **LOWER BODY POWER - INCLUDE LANDING, COUNTERMOVEMENT JUMP, AND SQUAT JUMP VARIATIONS**





- **FIELD BASED**
 - **PUSH UPS**
 - **GETTING OFF THE GROUND**
 - **SPORT SPECIFIC SKILLS - INJURY DEPENDANT**

- **MAKING TACKLES**
 - **TACKLE PROGRESSION - KNEELING, FALLING, STANDING, MOVING**
 - **SHOULDER TO PAD CONTACT PROGRESSIONS**
 - **CONTROLLED WRESTLE/PUMMEL**



STAGE 2: CONTROLLED CONTACT

OUTCOME MEASURES AND GOALS

OUTCOME MEASURE	DESCRIPTION	GOAL	
Strength	<p>Injury dependant strength exercises progressing towards a return to goal strength.</p> <p>Additional assessments of frontal and sagittal plane exercises in shoulder specific external rotation assessment.</p>	90% of pre-injury strength	
Power	Broad Jump 85-90% of pre-injury score.	85-90% of pre-injury scores	
Completed all Stage 2 Drills	Can complete all drills in Stage 2 safely and with confidence. Can execute a tackle in a controlled environment.	Stage 2 Complete	



STAGE 3: CONTROLLED CHAOS

Overview

In Stage 3, the player's readiness for full-contact rugby league activities is thoroughly assessed. Tackling technique is reviewed to ensure it meets safety standards.

This stage also introduces 'taking tackles', and important aspect of the game and one that is often neglected in the return to contact process.

Drills completed in this stage are at a higher intensity and higher density e.g. repeated tackle efforts.

Stage 3 provides opportunities to challenge players in modified contact scenarios. Drills incorporate all aspects of tackling including one on one, two on one, two on two, three on one in both ground based and standing type tackles.

Goals of Stage 3

Introduction of Taking Tackles

Conditioning training to prepare for return to play

Contact drills specific to game elements

Stage 3 includes drills from stages 1-2



STAGE 3 DRILLS

Drill Ideas



Stage 3

STRENGTH

- **GYM BASED**
 - **UPPER BODY POWER AND FORCE ABSORPTION**
 - **TRUNK AND NECK STRENGTH**
 - **LOWER BODY STRENGTH**
 - **LOWER BODY POWER**





- **MAKING TACKLES**
 - **STANDING TACKLES**
 - **MULTIPLE TACKLE TYPES**
 - **REPEATED TACKLE EFFORTS**
 - **CONTROLLED CHAOTIC WRESTLE/PUMMEL**

- **TAKING TACKLES**
 - **SAME PROGRESSIONS AS MAKING, BUT AS THE BALL RUNNER**
 - **CONTROLLED LANDING PROGRESSIONS**
 - **PLAYING THE BALL**



STAGE 3: CONTROLLED CHAOS

OUTCOME MEASURES AND GOALS

OUTCOME MEASURE	DESCRIPTION	GOAL	
Confidence Questionnaire	Player's can complete the Shoulder Instability Return to Sport Index (Appendix 1), as a measure of confidence in returning to play.	>90%	
Strength and Power	Med Ball throw 90-100% of pre-injury score. Strength levels above 90% of pre-injury. Additional assessments of frontal and sagittal plane exercises in shoulder specific external rotation assessment.	100% of pre-injury scores	
Completed all Stage 3 Drills	Can complete all drills in Stage 3 safely and with confidence. Can take a tackle in controlled environment.	Stage 3 Complete	



STAGE 4: GAME SPECIFIC

Overview

A final medical evaluation confirms that the injury has fully healed and full strength has been restored. Tackling technique is reviewed to ensure it meets required standards.

Players should be integrated into full training. Consider starting with the player wearing a coloured vest to identify them as 'low contact' during drills.

The player's confidence and comfort level with full-contact scenarios are assessed, and physical conditioning is evaluated to meet the demands of Rugby League. Assessments from medical, performance staff, and coaches contribute to the decision-making process, and full clearance is granted only when all criteria are met. Injury prevention education is reinforced, emphasizing the importance of safe play and reporting any discomfort or changes promptly.

Stage 4 marks the culmination of the rehabilitation journey and the player's return to full-contact rugby league activities.

Goals of Stage 4 100% Intensity

Injury Prevention

High level execution of contact drills

Integration into full training

Stage 4 includes drills from stages 1-3



STAGE 4 DRILLS

Drill Ideas



Stage 4

STRENGTH

- **GYM BASED**
 - **SHOULDER STABILITY**
 - **TRUNK AND NECK STRENGTH**
 - **WHOLE BODY STRENGTH AND POWER**
- **MAKING TACKLES**
 - **MULTIPLE TACKLE TYPES IN GAME SCENARIOS**
 - **REPEATED TACKLE EFFORTS**
 - **CHAOTIC WRESTLE/PUMMEL**
- **TAKING TACKLES**
 - **SAME PROGRESSIONS AS MAKING, BUT AS THE BALL RUNNER**
- **GAME SPECIFIC**
 - **FULL INTEGRATION INTO TRAINING**
 - **MULTIPLE GAME SCENARIOS**
 - **1-2 FULL WEEKS OF UNMODIFIED TRAINING BEFORE RETURN TO PLAY**



STAGE 4: GAME SPECIFIC

OUTCOME MEASURES AND GOALS

OUTCOME MEASURE	DESCRIPTION	GOAL	
Integrated into full training	<p>Has completed at least* 1 week of full training. Include measures of a typical training week - total distance, total workload (RPE_xDuration, High Speed running, accel load)</p> <p>*1 week minimum for senior athletes 2 week minimum for junior or community athletes</p>	Normal training load	
Completed all Stage 4 Drills	<p>Can complete all drills in Stage 4 safely and with confidence. Including a range of game specific scenarios.</p>	Stage 4 Complete	



NOTES

- Include conditioning in each stage to maintain fitness levels.
- A 'Return to Run' protocol could be considered, depending on the injury, to run in conjunction with the Return to Contact Framework. The QRL aims to create a Return to Run protocol in the future.
- Include neck strength exercises at each stage to minimize concussion risk when returning to games.
- Progress from control to chaos.
- Collaboration is **essential** with medical team and coaches.
- Coach and Player have final tick off (consider confidence levels of player as measure).



