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## Groh discourages 'block tackles'

### When Wal-Mart Drops Dead

There's a noose around the neck of Wal-Mart's retail empire. The reign of the "King of Retail" is over. Who is the heir to the throne? An up-and-coming rival that's the first company in history to grow its sales from \$0 to \$3 billion in under 6 years.

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By Michael Phillips, Richmond Times-Dispatch, Va.

Nov. 10--CHARLOTTESVILLE Virginia linebacker Aaron Clark refers to them as "wool hits." It's what happens when a defensive player makes a stop so big that the crowd makes a loud noise for it on each successive replay, and it makes SportsCenter that night.

"You always want to be the guy that did that, so you can brag about it," he said.

However, it can occasionally turn ugly, in the form of a head or neck injury.

The risk is greatest when a defensive player lowers his head as he speeds in on the player with the ball to make a hit, resulting in a violent collision.

Cavs coach Al Groh refers to that as a "block tackle," saying that when a player comes flying in to create impact at a high speed, what he's doing is more like blocking than tackling.

"Flying like a rocket is not good fundamental tackling," he said. "We see lots of players in football do that these days, but it's -- I'm sure there are no defensive coaches in the country that are running a drill that does that."

He acknowledges that it's becoming more prevalent in the college game. On Sunday, he reviewed tackling with his team after Saturday's 52-17 loss to Miami. It was a game in which U.Va. players were occasionally guilty of making block tackles.

Groh emphasized that aside from bad technique, it's also bad football. Without getting hands around a ballcarrier to wrap him up, it's easier for him to bounce off the hit and continue running.

"When you jump in there and block tackle, as coach calls it, it's almost like you're trying to block the dude instead of tackling him," Clark said. "There's a higher chance you're going to hurt yourself and miss the tackle."

Groh attributed its prevalence to players copying other players.

Any data regarding injury trends are anecdotal, but the nature of head injuries and football has been a hot topic in recent weeks, with Congress holding hearings after a University of Michigan study showed a higher prevalence of Alzheimer's in football players than the general population.

At Virginia, the results have been less extreme. The last big head injury to occur by a tackler was in 2005, when Nate Lyles was paralyzed after taking a knee in the head by a Georgia Tech running back. He made a remarkable recovery and briefly was on the New York Jets roster.

Groh always has been a defensive-minded coach and has emphasized strong fundamentals. He's hoping that Sunday's refresher course will pay dividends going forward.

The coach also cited cornerback Ras-I Dowling as a player who has made some strong fundamental tackles in the open field.

Notes:

--Groh said Jimmy Howell will be the starting punter this week, after Nathan Rathjen was benched early in Saturday's game.

--Regarding a face mask penalty against Cam Johnson, the coach said that he had a request for clarification out to the ACC.

He indicated he was not satisfied with the explanation in a report printed Sunday on VirginiaSports.com, which quoted ACC coordinator of officials Doug Rhoads as saying that the face mask call was made by the referee, not the replay judge, but that the official forgot to announce it before going to the replay.

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