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**Headline:** Grip it, tuck it

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FAYETTEVILLE - Jemal Singleton, a 1999 Air Force Academy graduate, is reluctant to credit the Naval Academy for anything.

But Singleton, the first-year Arkansas running backs coach, cannot deny the Fumble Pro, a device created by former Navy fullback Matt Hall and aerospace engineer James Smith, that helps **ball** carriers focus on securing the football.

Singleton began using the device, a football connected by a cord to a "slap handle," last year at Oklahoma State.

"It's an aid that simulates more of getting hit, the jolt, the power and the force that's put on the football," Singleton said. "It's the closest thing I could find, without beating up your players and actually having them hit."

"It's a really good tool. I hate to say it, but it was a Naval Academy grad that did it."

Arkansas tailback Jonathan Williams said Singleton has introduced a couple of new fumble drills that put a greater emphasis on locking down the **ball**.

"They're kind of tough to hold on to, but it'll just get us better," Williams said.

Oklahoma State's backs combined for 509 touches in 2014 and put the **ball** on the ground once, where it was recovered by a Cowboys player.

Improved **ball** security has been a point of emphasis for Coach Bret Bielema in his third season at Arkansas.

Bielema said he knew of Singleton's reputation for using innovative drills to keep backs from fumbling even before interviewing him for the job.

"I think I might even be able **to** hold on **to** the football if I was coached by him," Bielema said.

In Bielema's search **to** replace departed running backs coach Joel Thomas, now with New Orleans Saints, emphasis on **ball** security was high on the list of things Bielema was interested in hearing about.

"He really has some finer teaching points that were very impressive," Bielema said of his interviewing process with Singleton. "Now that's something we preach every day, you know what I mean? But it's taken it **to** a whole new level of Red Bull and emphasis and results in our program, because it's not an option. It's part of what we are."

Arkansas was the only FBS team with two 1,000-yard rushers last season in Williams and Alex Collins, but Razorbacks' runners have had critical fumbles the past couple of seasons.

Kody Walker was denied an early touchdown against Alabama last fall when a punch from behind dislodged the **ball** inside the half-yard line and it rolled out of the end zone. Williams and Collins both lost fumbles in a 21-14 loss at Missouri **to** end the regular season, with Collins' mishandling of a **ball** - a fumble determined solely from the replay official - ending the Razorbacks' last possession at the Tigers' 35-yard line with 2:13 left in the game.

Collins and Williams both had fumbles in Arkansas' second quarter meltdown in its 45-32 loss **to** Georgia. Arkansas recovered Williams' fumble, but the Bulldogs pounced on Collins' lost **ball** at the Razorbacks' 7 and scored a touchdown on the next snap.

Arkansas tied for 79th nationally with 11 lost fumbles last season, though not all of them came from the running backs.

Singleton's emphasis on grip and tuck hammer home the facets of securing the **ball**, but nothing symbolizes his passion for protecting the **ball** like his circuits with the Fumble Pro. Sometimes the back holds a **ball** underneath each of his arms while Singleton and an assistant stand in front of and behind the runner snapping their handles and trying **to pull** the balls free.

In another circuit, the back holds one **ball** and jumps over a series of dummies **to** the ground while gripping the **ball** against the **pull** of the cords. Fullback Tyler Colquitt had the **ball** jiggle just a moment during the dummies drill, though he didn't fumble, with the media in attendance early in spring. Singleton sent Colquitt back in the line **to** do it again.

"The guys using them early, the **ball's** flying all over the place, and then as you progress and they get better at it, it kind of cleans up," Singleton said. "It really forces some good habits.

"I'm always looking for something new, whether it's water balls, punch sticks or Fumble Pros, all the things I continue **to** use and just push the envelope a bit."

Singleton also uses a boxing glove secured **to** the end of a pole - the punch stick - **to** jab at the football in another drill.

First-year offensive coordinator Dan Enos was so taken by Singleton's techniques that he's emphasized them **to** the quarterbacks and receivers in addition **to** the backs.

"Obviously you're really good at what you decide **to emphasize** and we've decided **to emphasize**, from Coach Bielema permeating all the way down through the rest of us, we're going **to** be as good [in **ball** security] as we can be."

Singleton also adopted a new rule that re-defines a fumble as any **ball** that isn't handed over **to** an official at the end of a play.

"He came from Oklahoma State and a guy from Oklahoma State - Barry Sanders - is a guy who always gave the **ball** back **to** the referee and that's what he expects us **to** do, no matter if it's after a touchdown or after a play," Williams said.

"I told the guys I've never seen a play called a fumble when the player handed it **to** the official," Singleton said. "So it just takes away all doubt.

"And I think, respectfully, you score a touchdown, hand the **ball to** the official. It shows class. There are guys that have scored a million touchdowns and they're able **to** do that, so I think we can do it here."

Singleton said he doesn't like it when a player sets the **ball** on the ground.

"I think you can look at the history of football and see how many games have been changed because of something as simple as that, so hand the **ball to** the official and we won't have a problem," Singleton said.

An example of Singleton's point occurred in the closing moments of Wisconsin's 32-30 loss at Arizona State in 2013, when quarterback Joel Stave was tripped by one of his linemen as the Badgers tried **to** kill the **ball** and set up for a game-winning field goal. Instead of handing the **ball to** an official, Stave left it on the ground at the 15, Arizona State players fell on the **ball** and the clock ran out in the confusion.

"I told the quarterbacks in our meetings, basically from here on out, hand the **ball to** an official, or in practice hand it **to** a manager, because also that builds our habits when we're in two-minute offense," Enos said. "Obviously, if you end up with the **ball** when the play is over, you immediately want **to** hand it **to** an official so they can spot it quickly."

Caption: NWA Democrat-Gazette/ MICHAEL WOODS

Arkansas running back coach Jemal Singleton is working with the Hogs' backfield in hopes of reducing the team's number of fumbles.

Bielema

NWA Democrat-Gazette/MICHAEL WOODS

Arkansas running backs coach Jemal Singleton has introduced the Fumble Pro, a device designed **to** help **ball** carriers grip and tuck the football better, during the Razorbacks' spring workouts. Singleton used the Fumble Pro, which links a football **to** a cord, while at Oklahoma State and has implemented it with the Razorbacks as a way

to help cut down on turnovers and improve **ball** security.  
Williams

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