THE ATTACKING SCRUM
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Introduction

Even though there are fewer scrums involved in the modern game, the Rugby scrum is still a major attacking weapon if used smartly and effectively. Due to the structure of the "modern game" and rule changes (advantage rule), scrums numbers per game have decreased from an average of 30 odd in the 1980's and 90's to about 15 in the 2000's. There have been recent games where numbers of scrums have been in single figures. Purists are touting the demise of the scrum as evidence that we are heading toward playing the game the way League is played. This line of thinking is incorrect. Although there are fewer scrums in today's game this does not diminish the importance and uniqueness of this set piece. In fact the scrum, if applied correctly, becomes an essential attacking platform to the modern game and maximises attacking options.

Aim

This overview will identify the complexities and the extreme importance of a dominant scrum in attack, how and when to use it and then the technical and physical application needed to achieve this.
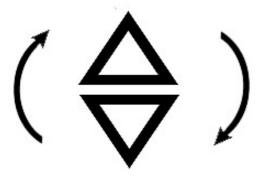
General

It appears that many sides take for granted their loose head scrum as an easy 'win' option rather than a principal attacking weapon. From a well-structured, aggressive and controlled scrum feed invariably will flow sequence and phase play that is executed with confidence across the advantage line. With the new "player through the gate" law and players staying on their feet and unloading early, the defence is placed at sixes and sevens and this puts the attackers in a confident mode.
Through analysing videos and games it is not difficult to detect that on the majority of loose head feeds the back-row don't push. They are obviously thinking or have been coached to concentrate on the subsequent breakdown and phase from that scrum. A good scrum however is a transferable item and strong planned scrummaging builds authority and confidence in each other.

In 1980 – 90 there was a great emphasis on attacking the opposition scrum, used often and more importantly to set up a powerful platform from a loose head. Teams were drilled well and there were various options the scrum could take.

Option 1

Loose head wheel.

Loose head side forward, tight head side back. This takes the scrum forward on the left, the easier of the wheels.
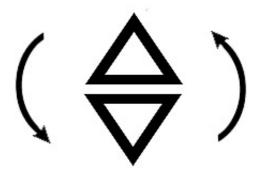
Option 2

Eight man.

The whole scrum pushes forward in a straight line. Usually employed for the push over try but was often used to assert dominance over opposing side.
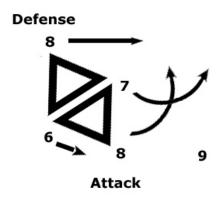
<u>Option 3</u>

Reverse wheel

Tight head up and loose back. This is against the grain and although hard to perfect, can demoralise the opposition. Australia in the 1984 grand slam scored off this against Wales and broke them.

The year 2000 heralded a hesitancy to use these options due to the changing nature of the game. Many coach's priorities focused on containing and winning their own ball and above all conserve the player's energy at the scrum contest. Obviously the forwards were called upon to run and defend more than they had previously had to and if they were too tired from the scrum, then they would be ineffective across the field. Good coaches saw that to dominate opposing scrums was to gain controlled possession so as to maximise attacking options.
The theory therefore should be that you should be aggressive on the side you wish to run, while maintaining pressure, aggression and control from all eight forwards until the ball is out. Because the loose head side is the natural way to wheel, the majority of your feeds should be directed that way. Note that on this wheel the attacking team must have a well drilled back-row and be aware of opposition half who will be defending on this side .The back-row and halfback must have good communication and the scrum effective and quick.

Options for ball distribution on this wheel are that:-

- 8 picks and drives into opposite half and with either a quick offload on feet (preferable) or goes to ground for quick ruck ball.
- 8 drives on feet to opposite half 6 blocks on right and 9 blocks left (tripod), leaving 7 to either distribute or receive a pop ball.

However this does not rule out the reverse wheel, as at all times you must keep the opposition thinking. This also takes the ball away from the side of the defending halfback, bearing in mind that the law states that the back-row must stay bound until after the ball is out. This allows the ball closer to the gain line and immediately takes a defending back-row out of the contest, creating a 3 on 2 situation.

How do we achieve this?

To be confident implementing this in a game plan, the technical and physical applications are critical.

Technical Application

1. Quick assembly (always beat opposition at this)
2. Quick binds
3. Communication
   a. Scrum call
   b. Back's linkage depending on current field position.
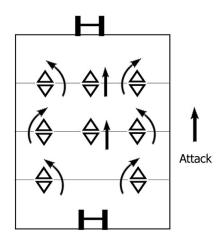4. Attitude – Domination and intimidation

Physical Application

1. Scrum machine for rhythm and calls
2. Live scrums
3. Dynamic engagement - Hit and dominate
4. Maintaining pressure throughout
5. Collective call throughout to bring scrum up on left or right

Aerobic and Anaerobic Fitness (once a week)

1. 8 man straight scrum – 'and now - 2, 3, 4, 5' (**x 5**)
2. Up on left – 'and now 2, 3, 4 and hold' (**x 5**)
3. Up on right - 'and now 2, 3, 4 and hold' (**x 5**)
4. Play sequences off scrums (i.e. tripods and back-row moves, etc).
5. Finish session with jog and stretch to target lactic acid build up.

To apply this to team game plan at training the session may consist of 8 set plays on various parts of the field. This should be repeated 2 or 3 times. All team members <u>must</u> be aware of the sequences and phases from that scrum.

Opposition Counter

If the opposition counter (which a good side will), then the scrum must work to keep in control. The likelihood is that they will counter with one of two options. The first is that they will muscle up on their tight head side to counter your wheel. If they don't have a good scrum they will find this very difficult. If it works for them, the attacking scrum should not panic, as you can still work off a good straight scrum. Effectively you

have committed them completely to the scrummage including the back-row.

The second option (and most likely) is the opposition will probably go with the wheel and try for a 180° force turnover. This is where the attackers have to be strong and well drilled. They must not allow the scrum to screw the full 180º and use the wheel to their advantage by a back-row move on gain line.

All back-row moves are to be executed with speed to maximise the opposition being on the back-foot. Don't over complicate these moves and all involved players are to know them intimately. It is also vitally important that other back-row options are available in response to the attacking scrum being countered which shouldn't affect the overall plan of attack. Options are a last resort and should only occur if in the scrum they lose their footing, there is an injury or a player is physically spent or lacks focus.

Conclusion

A good Rugby side needs to have a good enough scrum to win their own ball. If they can attack the opposition feed and disrupt quality ball then this is a bonus. The scrum has to be disciplined and accountable with the whole team understanding the structure of the following attack sequence.

A dynamic scrum effectively puts the opposition back-row out of the defence. In the modern game this is essential if the team is to be successful. Invariably if a team dominates up front then they can expect more attacking opportunities. In addition, a good attacking scrum will build authority and confidence within any side.

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