

## **Penetrating an Inside Shoulder Defence**

### **Damien Hill (ACTRU)**

Thankfully, the perfect defence is yet to be developed. Rugby and its constant changes are geared (at least for the Southern Hemisphere) towards the playing of an entertaining game where attack has the advantage over defence.

This paper focuses on angled running to beat a defensive line. There are many complementary factors, such as individual skill, speed and body height, that are also important to crossing the defence however they will not be expanded on here.

The paper starts with an overview of an inside shoulder defence and then progresses onto penetrating the defensive line.

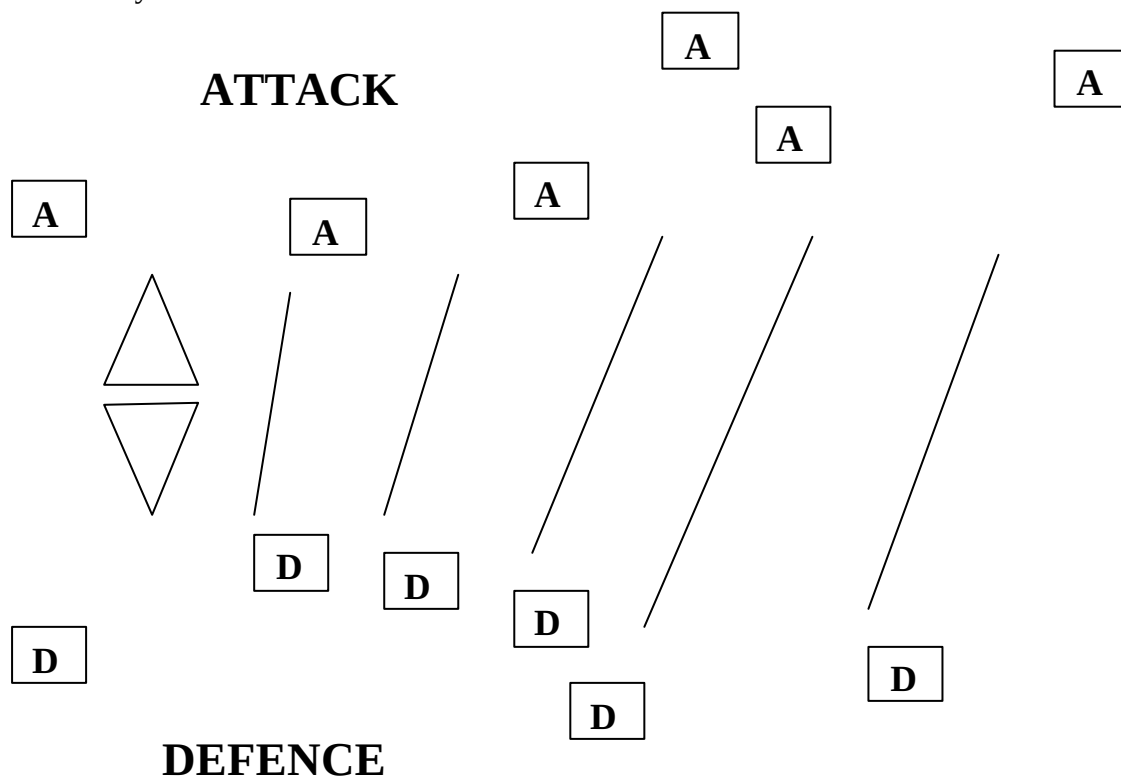
#### **THE AIM OF THE DEFENCE**

The primary aim of any defence is to regain the ball. The secondary aim is to prevent the attack crossing the advantage line. This is achieved by:

1. Applying pressure to reduce the time and space available to the attackers, thereby hurrying the decision makers and limiting the attacking teams options.
2. Effective tackling.
3. Contesting the ball.

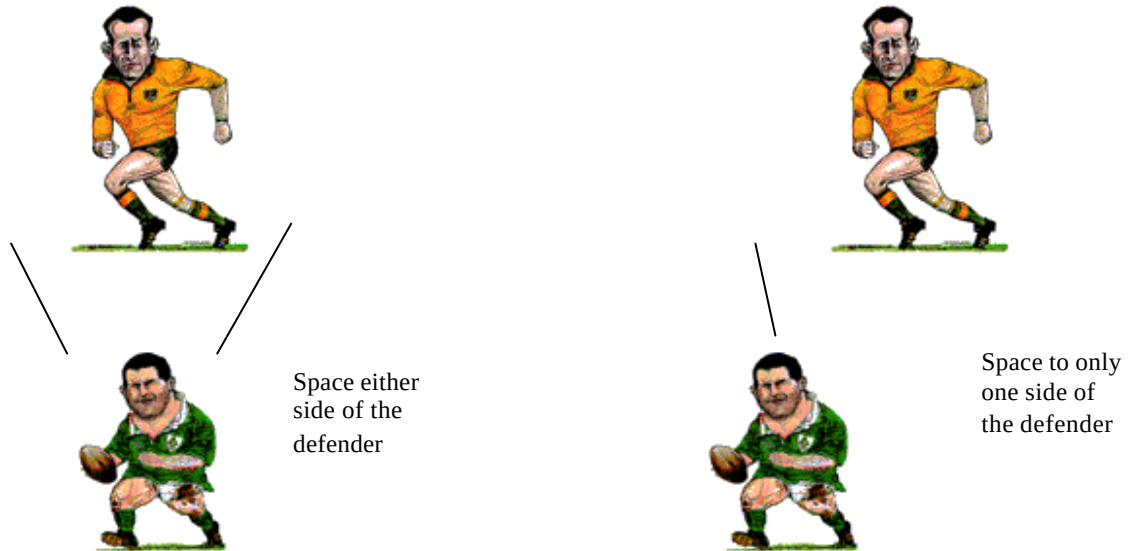
#### **Inside shoulder defence**

Most defence in today's rugby is based on attacking the inside shoulder of the opposition. This system of defence is also referred to as slide or drift defence.



## Advantages

The advantages of attacking the inside shoulder of the attacker is that it reduces the options of the attacker and encourages them to run across field and/or move the ball wide to where the space is.



Defenders initially compress towards the set play or breakdown, and then slide outwards, reducing the space available to attack and utilising the sideline as an additional defender. With this defensive system, the defenders are intent on maintaining the integrity of the defensive line to eliminate or close off the option of “coming in”. Instead they wait and see what the move is and then react to shut down the attack.

## Requirements

In addition to the ability to tackle, a successful inside shoulder defence requires :

- Discipline – to maintain the defensive line
- Communication – to identify responsibilities
- Familiarity of the inside and outside man's capabilities (speed, tackling effectiveness) – so that the space between defenders is appropriate.

## PENETRATION

To penetrate a defensive line we either go through it by creating space or around it by preserving space. Kicking over the top or through a defensive line is also an option, however the risk (compared to the first two options) of a turnover is arguably greater.

As coaches we must train our players to recognise where to attack for the best result. They must therefore be trained to recognise when one or more of the abovementioned requirements falters and react accordingly.

Players need to be able to create/recognise and capitalise on:

- advantages in numbers
- lazy/injured/tired defenders not sliding to cover space on the inside of the adjacent sliding defender
- a defender being drawn across field leaving space inside
- a defender coming out of his line (creating space behind) or falling out of the defensive line (creating space in front)
- mismatches in defence (eg a tight five forward against an outside back)

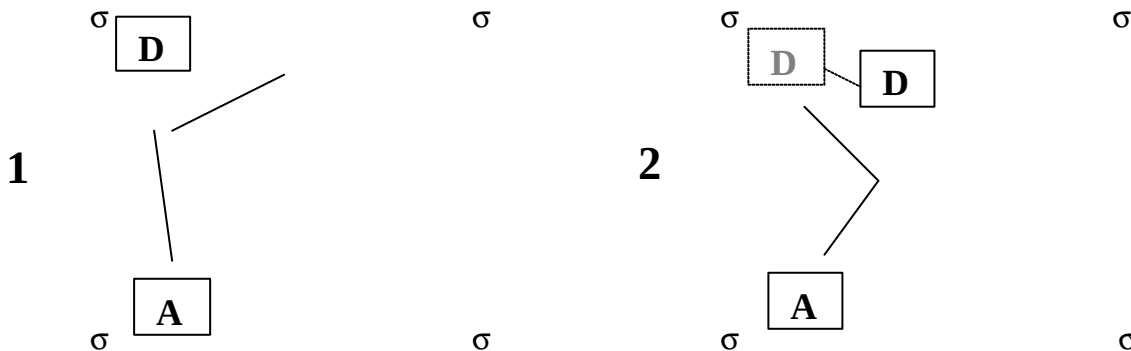
### Creating and preserving space

Once the ball carrier has advanced the ball forward to a point where it is no longer possible to progress, the responsibility of the ball carrier is then to create or preserve space for his support. This can be achieved by:

1. fixing a defender to preserve space, and
2. moving a defender to create space

This can be achieved by coaching our players to change their running angles and targeting the space inside and outside of a defender.

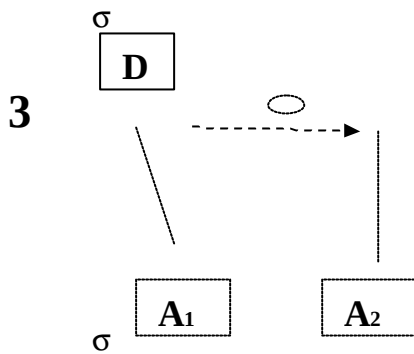
#### Drills 1 v 1



**Defenders focus:** staying on the inside shoulder of the Attacker, pushing up and then out.

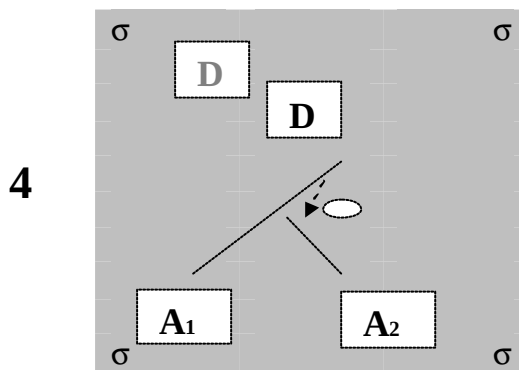
**Attackers focus:** fixing the defender and then taking the preserved space on the outside (1) OR moving the defender across the grid and taking the created space on the inside (2).

## Drills 2 v 1



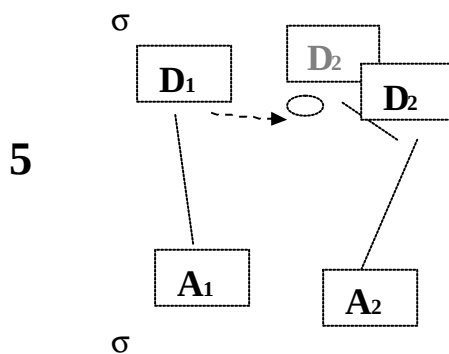
**Defender focus:** staying inside A1 (ball carrier), pushing up and then out to reduce the space and options of A1 and A2.

**Attackers focus:** fixing the defender to preserve space on the outside and passing to A2 running into space (3) OR moving the defender across the grid to create space and pass to A2 running into space (4)



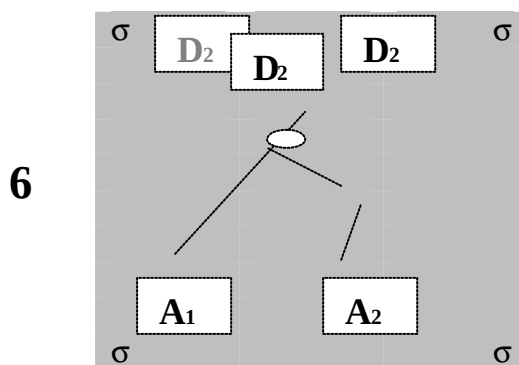
**Note:** in both cases the ball carrier must have the vision to use the space if the defender commits to the other attacker early. In other words, do not condition the ball carrier to always pass to his support if the the best option is to retain the ball and continue to go forward.

## Drills 2 v 2



**Defender focus:** D1 staying inside on the inside shoulder of A1, D2 staying on the inside shoulder of A2, pushing up and then out to reduce the space and options A1 and A2.

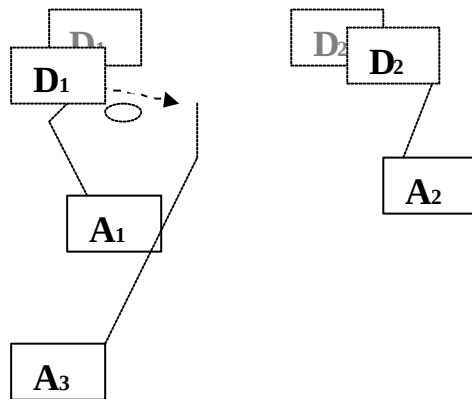
**Attackers focus:** A1 is attempting to fix D1 to preserve space on the outside. A2 is attempting to move D2 across the grid to create space to run into and receive a short, flat pass from A2 (5)



**Attackers focus:** A1 is attempting to move D1 to Create space on the inside for A2. A2 is trying to fix D2 initially and then run into the space and receive a switch pass from A1 (6).

It is important to remember that in a game situation the ball carrier who penetrates the defensive line would be faced with adjacent defenders. The ball carrier must therefore be coached to straighten his run once he is past the defender.

These drills are the starting point from which “moves” can be built to beat inside shoulder defensive lines. For example, combining an inside angled running player with an outside running player to create space for a third support player



By utilising grids we are limiting the working space of the players in attack and defence thereby training the players to create and preserve space for their support players in game specific conditions.

In summary, this paper has only concentrated on angled running, however by coaching these simple running lines we are developing a solid platform from which to build our “moves” and increase the effectiveness against an inside shoulder defence. Players will begin to look for flaws in the defensive line and will have the confidence in their ability to create and preserve space for their support.

Damien Hill