

1. Hypothesis

My hypothesis is this - that the new Law 18/19 requirement, (i.e. that the third man in to a tackled situation be on his feet), will cause a new skill to be adopted by successful rugby sides. Rather than simply diving in and "building the wall", a practice previously sanctioned by referees as positive play, the third man in will have to pick up the ball, take one or two steps, and then go to ground placing the ball behind him, making the ball available for his teammate to possibly do the same. In the absence of a better name, I have called this "*pick and place*" forward play.

2. Analysis of the Alternative Options at the Tackle.

The various forward play alternatives at the tackle appear to be the following:

- (a) "Clear Out" opposition players from the tackle area.
- (b) Pick up the ball and try to form a maul.
- (c) Pick up the ball and move forward to confront the opposition in a driving maul situation.

(N.B. The fourth option at the tackle is obviously to pick up the ball and kick, pass or run with it. I have deliberately not considered this as I am concentrating on forward play.)

I believe that in senior rugby, all of these options are fraught with danger. Option (a), clear out opposition players from the tackle area, has some inherent problems. The ball can become isolated in general play, thus allowing an opponent to come in *from any side* to pick up the ball and still be onside. For the clear out option to succeed, your side must be extremely well drilled, with backlines realigning quickly and forwards remaining on their feet so as not to be left behind.

Option (b), pick up the ball and try to form a maul, is probably the least effective option. If no opponents are at the tackle on their feet *immediately when your player picks up the ball*, a static target is created for some opposition forward to "smash" at will. Even if opponents are in the immediate vicinity, remaining static gives them a better than even chance of disturbing your chances of winning clean ball.

Option (c) is better than option (b), but still has inherent dangers. It relies on the player moving forward, presenting the ball in a way that provides the opposition with a chance to at least "kill" the movement by wrapping up your player and the ball, or at worst, dispossess your player. Keeping possession in this situation is all the more important now that the Maul Law gives the ensuing scrum feed to the opposition team.

It also assumes that the player moving forward has sufficient teammates to secure possession and keep their momentum. Again, this will require extremely disciplined and mobile forward packs to be successful.

3. Advantages Gained By Adopting "Pick & Place" Forward Play

- (a) It satisfies the requirements of the new tackle Law. Law 18 (1)(b) states that "after a tackle any other player must be on his feet when he plays the ball." Because the third player in *is on his feet when he plays the ball* the tackle is over and it is general play when the player goes to ground with the ball.
- (b) It keeps the momentum moving forward without isolating the ball carrier. Even though the point of continuity may only be moved forward a metre or so in each movement, this still significant in moving the advantage line forward and accruing all the advantages that

entails. The forwards can gain two or three steps of momentum before engaging an opponent and the backline is moving forward if and when they receive possession.

- (c) It commits opponents to the ball carrier and hopefully takes one or two to the ground, thus taking out of play. After two or three "pick & place" movements, up to six or seven opponents may be on the ground and out of play. Those remaining on their feet will have their defensive alignment in tatters.
- (d) It "shields" the ball from the opposition, thus creating a "mini wall". Most coaches in senior rugby acknowledged the tactic of "building the wall" as an effective method of securing possession at the tackle. Given that this is now outlawed, "pick & place" allows your side to move forward and create a controlled one-man shield from opponents kicking the ball, picking it up, killing it, etc.
- (e) It creates a controlled, forward propelling movement. The principle argument against "clearing out" at the tackle is that it raises the tempo of the movement, which may result in handling errors by players coming through. One possible reason for this is that opponents are able to pressure them more easily because it becomes a general play situation. "Pick & place" results in more of your team being in the vicinity of the ball carrier. Thus, "safety in numbers" should prevent some handling errors.
- (f) It is easy to referee. That is, the referee should always be able to see the ball in your team's possession. Thus, any attempt by the opposition to kill the movement will usually result in a favourable decision from the referee. The effect of this should not be underestimated. As long as the referee sees the ball, he is unlikely to blow-up static movements, with the feed going to the opposition.

4. Experience in Games To Date.

The best example I have seen of "pick & place" was in the NSW v Wales game in 1991. NSW kept possession for incredibly large slabs of the match by using this technique to prevent the ball carrier from being isolated. Rod Macqueen later stated at the 1992 Level II course at Narrabeen that NSW's objective was to keep possession while keeping continuity. That is, as few line-outs and scrums as possible, even though they would probably win them. In effect, NSW pre-empted the new Laws.

Since the Law changes have come into effect in June, I have experienced games where all of the aforementioned options have been used. I honestly believe "pick & place" to be the best option in a tackle situation.