INTERNATIONAL RUGBY BOARD
LEVEL 3 COACHING
ANALYSIS & PREPARATION
FOR COACHES

IRB
INTERNATIONAL
RUGBY BOARD

Level 3 Coaching
Analysis & Preparation for Coaches
Course reference manual

Contents

Overview

Foreword

Welcome to the IRB Level 3 Coaching Course Reference Manual. This manual is designed to be used in three separate ways:

• as a stand alone resource for reference or to refresh your knowledge
• to support the Level 3 Coaching - Analysis and Preparation for Coaches workbook

The presence of sport in a person's life carries enormous benefits for social, physical and personal development while broadening cultural awareness. Rugby is a uniquely inclusive sport, and you, as a coach, hold a position of genuine influence over the players' rate of personal development and their sense of community and self-worth.

The Level 3 Coaching course will support you throughout a season and will focus on planning, delivery and review. The contacts over the season will be varied including face-to-face and observation of your coaching at work in your own environment. Assessment will be ongoing and tracked using the IRB Level 3 Coach transcript which can be seen in the accompanying workbook.

At the conclusion of the Level 3 Coaching course, to show competence and therefore gain accreditation, you will need to demonstrate the ability to plan, implement, analyse and revise an annual coaching programme while demonstrating advanced coaching competence.

I sincerely hope you enjoy the course.

Mark Harrington
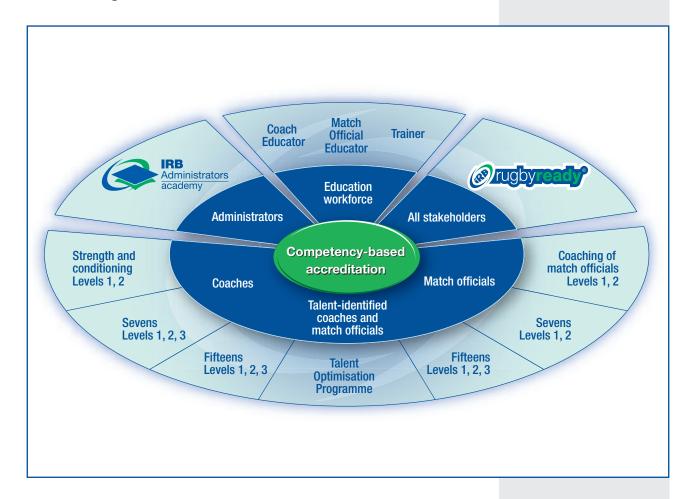Training Manager, International Rugby Board

About this resource

This resource is a course manual for the IRB Coaching Level 3 course. The accompanying workbook should be added to this manual as you attend the course.

Educator notes are available separately from the IRB.

IRB Training and Education courses

IRB Training and Education courses have evolved since the mid 1990s, and have been updated regularly since then, using the expertise in member Unions and the skills of a select number of IRB Trainers who are also 'content experts'.

Since 2006, the IRB provision has extended to serve more stakeholders, as demonstrated in the portfolio above. All courses are now competency-based, designed to provide learning and training appropriate to the contexts in which coaches and officials are active.

In addition, IRB courses can now only be delivered by IRB licensed Educators who have demonstrated their technical and facilitation skills to prescribed standards. All record keeping and certification is undertaken from the IRB's headquarters in Dublin, Ireland.

Module 1 - Selection and succession planning

Overview

There are essentially two methods of selection. The first is to decide on a game plan and then select a team to play to it. The second is to select the best players and develop a game plan that best uses their abilities.

The decisions around team selection and the game plan to be played are taken simultaneously. In practice, there is no tangible division between the two. Some coaches may feel they have the talent to select a team to play to an ideal game plan. If this is true, the team is probably playing in a competition for which they are too strong, such that their strengths are not obvious and their weaknesses not exposed.

Because few coaches find themselves in this situation, this course is based on the assumption that a team has to play to its strengths and avoid its weaknesses. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of a team implies a knowledge of the opponents' strengths and weaknesses too.

Some initial considerations

While it is desirable to have a team full of multi-skilled players, this must be balanced against the need for positional specialisation, especially to gain possession. Unless due attention is given to gaining possession, little else can be achieved successfully.

The method of selecting players varies depending on the number of players available who are of the required standard. In most cases, choices are limited and the selection should therefore be made against a checklist of fundamental criteria for each position.

When there is a greater number of players available, most of whom will fulfil most aspects of the player's role requirements, the best route to successful selection will be to refer to the SWOT analysis and the team profile, the game profile and patterns of play.

Where options are greater, it is possible to devise the most effective game profile and select to it. Under these circumstances it is assumed that the players have a suitably high level of fundamental skills, both to play in a specific position and in general.

Selection method

Introduction

Ultimately, whether or not to select a player is based on the selector's subjective judgement, their 'gut reaction' and their instinct. However, this judgement is based on a feeling for the way the player plays. It should therefore be the last criteria for selection and not the first.

Prior to making this final judgement, an objective selection process can be used. This process involves a step-by-step method of selection that is systematic and comprehensive. This method will ensure that when the final choice is made, it is based on sound objectivity right up to the stage at which the final subjective selection is made.

Proactive versus reactive selection

When a team is selected proactively, it is selected to meet the requirement of an ideal game plan., i.e. the way the game should ideally be played. So the process would be to develop the ideal game plan and patterns of play, and then select the best available talent to play to it.

When a team is selected reactively, the first step is to develop a profile of the talents of the players that are available. While this is not a profile of a specific team, the process is the same. Once the player and team profiles have been developed its strengths and weaknesses will enable a game profile, patterns of play and game plan to be developed.

In most, if not all, situations, the reactive approach is the one followed by selectors and coaches. This is because the talent available has visible strengths and weaknesses. In all situations, the strengths and weaknesses are relative - they depend on the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition. There are few teams who can afford not to take this into account when they are preparing for a match. It would be reasonable to say that if a team is able to play proactively, to an ideal plan, then it is probably playing against opponents who are fundamentally less able. The team should probably be playing at a higher level, if there is one.

Game plans can sometimes be seen as being proactive when they are in fact reactive. Having observed the play of its opponents, a team changes its game plan to exploit its strengths and minimise the impact of its weaknesses. Of course, both strengths and weaknesses are relative to those of the opposing team. Consequently, the method of selection explained in this section is based on the reactive approach rather than the proactive approach. Realistically, this will be of more use to you as a coach.

Steps involved in the selection method

The steps that should be followed when selecting a team are:

Step one	**Team profile**
Step two	**Game profile**
Step three	**Positional requirements**
Step four	**Analysis of players**
Step five	**Selection responsibilities**
Step six	**Observing games**
Step seven	**Selection meetings**
Step eight	**Co-ordination and consistency**
Step nine	**Attitude**
Step ten	**Intuition**

Step one – the team profile

The use of the word 'team' could be said to be misleading in this context, because the profile takes into account all the playing talent that is available, not just the fifteen players in the team.

From the total pool of players available the principles of play are used to categorise strengths and weaknesses. The following player profile analysis form can be used for this purpose. Essential to this stage of the process is a knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual players who are available for selection.

The idea is to write as detailed as possible a profile for each player listing their strengths and weaknesses. Time spent on detail at this early stage of the process will help to ensure that the conclusions reached later in the process are accurate.

The player profile form should be dated so that comparisons can be made with profiles at different times during a player's career. The form can also be the basis of an interview with a player when discussing the player's training programme.

You can photocopy the form as many times as required, or alternatively see the PDF version which accompanies this manual. This can be completed electronically in Adobe Reader.

Player profile form

Player: . . . . **Date:** . . . .

Principles of play	Strengths	Weaknesses
ATTACK		
1. Gaining possession		
2. Going forward		
3. Providing support		
4. Maintaining continuity (rucks and mauls)		
5. Applying pressure		
DEFENCE		
1. Contesting possession		
2. Going forward		
3. Applying pressure (tackling)		
4. Preventing territory being gained		
5. Providing support		
6. Regaining possession		
7. Counter attacking		

Step two - game profile

Once the team profile has been completed, the game profile can be written. The principles of play are used so that the game profile has consistency with the team profile. Selection will then be based on achieving the game profile.

The game profile - *what* is to be achieved - can now be used to develop patterns of play and game plans, both of which explain *how* the game profile is to be achieved. These provide the selectors with the criteria for selection to be used when observing players.

Implicit in the game profile are the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing team. While these are important, it is important to be positive. The game profile and the patterns of play explain what and how the team will achieve its aims, throughout the season. They are, therefore, what the team is aiming to achieve throughout its matches. Weaknesses should not be dwelled upon. Teams should enter matches aiming to play to their strengths.

If too much emphasis is placed on the strengths and weaknesses of individual teams, the team will not develop its own style of play. In these circumstances, each match will be a one-off situation in which a team finds itself continually changing in reaction to opponents.

The aim should be to develop a proactive game profile and proactive patterns of play that a team imposes positively on opponents. Tactical changes are a change of emphasis within the patterns of play rather than playing to a different pattern of play for each match.

The following page shows an example of an attacking game profile.

Example of an attacking game profile

Principles of play	Example 1 Zones: Goal line to 22-metre line	Example 2 Lanes: between the touchline and 15-metre line	Example 3 Position of opponents at a mid-field scrum
1. Gaining possession	Clean delivery of the ball to the half back from a forward moving scrum, ruck, maul or lineout.	Controlled delivery from all sources of possession, driving froward to commit their forwards.	Controlled delivery going forward.
2. Going forward	Kick the ball to touch as far down the field as possible.	Use running and passing options beyond #13 to exploit the space that is available (within 15m lines).	Use the loose forwards and the backs to create more attackers than defenders by going left to right.
3. Providing support	Close support to ensure clean delivery. Position to offer more than one kicking option for the halfback.	Backing up to keep the move going.	Backing up once the initial roles have been completed.
4. Maintaining continuity (rucks and mauls)	Unimportant as it is more important to be further down the field.	If play has been stopped, phase possession to be used to prevent the defence from regrouping. Pass in the same direction again.	If play has been stopped, control the delivery, while still going forward, to create space.
5. Applying pressure	Avoid opponents' defensive pressure by controlling the ball and finding touch.	Maintain pressure by retaining possession and avoiding stoppages.	Maintain pressure by retaining possession and avoiding stoppages.

Step three - positional requirements

Once you have a game profile, you can take each playing position and list the positional requirements needed to achieve that game profile. The positional requirements listed are not for a specific game profile, they are a checklist for selection that can be modified to suit the game profile that you have developed. As an example, the positional requirements for a tight-head prop are listed below.

Tight-head prop

Scrums
• Call the scrum into engagement with the opposition.
• Lead in by being the first member of the front row to contact the opposing front row on your team's throw-in.
• Stabilise the scrum when the ball is put in on the loose-head so that the ball is delivered from a stable platform.

Lineouts (No. 3 position)
• Take up the same stance in the lineout no matter to where the ball is thrown
• Stand square-on to the opposition with the outside leg slightly ahead of the inside leg. This minimises body movement when supporting the catchers.
• As the catcher moves to the centre to jump and catch the ball, move in unison so that the support play prevents opponents making contact.
• Assist the catcher to jump higher and stabilise the jumper at maximum height until the ball is caught.
• Once the ball has been caught, make sure the catcher lands in a stable position, back-on to opponents.
• Hold the line to provide a protective screen when the ball is not thrown to #2 and # 4 jumpers.
• Alter positioning to ensure protected delivery of the ball (back-on) or to contribute to the drive (front-on).

Field play
• Decide on the best role to ensure a clean ball is won to continue play when approaching phase play.

Rucks (in possession)
• Bind and drive past the ball
• Bind on the side to protect the delivery of the ball to the halfback or other distributors.

Rucks (not in possession)
• Drive forward to slow down or stop the opposition drive and to slow their delivery of the ball.
• Pack on the side of the ruck and perform the defensive scrum role of a flanker
• Join the defensive screen to tackle a designated ball carrier.

Mauls (in possession)
• Bind on the side to protect the delivery of the ball to the halfback.
• Act as the pivot for a rolling maul after initially binding and driving forward.

Mauls (not in possession)
• Drive forward to slow down or stop their drive and to slow the opposition's delivery of the ball.
• Stop the rolling maul by driving onto the side towards which the maul is rolling.
• Stop the rolling maul by allowing it to roll towards the near touchline and then driving it into touch.

In defence
At all times be aware that backs could cut back against the initial flow of play. Be prepared to tackle the ball carrier.

Step four - Analysis of players

In step four the player profile forms that were used in step one are used in more detail. Here they are used to rank players by position. The ranking will be based on the positional requirements.

So long as there has been sufficient effort to ensure that the team profile and the game profile are accurate, then the positional requirements will be accurate. The players will therefore be judged by what is needed to be successful.

The player profile forms should be regularly updated. They can be used to follow the players' progress during the season. By ranking players according to the position based on the information on the forms, you will be in a position to make an initial selection.

The ranking also gives the selectors an order of priority, should first choices be injured or if more than one team has to be selected from the same pool of players.

Step five - Selection responsibilities

Once the players have been ranked and the rankings received throughout the selection period, players can be categorised into three groups - "in", "out" and "unsure".

• The "in" players are those who will definitely be in the team.
• The "out" players are those who will definitely not be in the team.
• The "unsure" players are those of whom you are unsure, and who will be competing with each other to make it into the team.

This method enables you to concentrate on the last group, the 'unsure' players. The selectors' task is now more manageable and selecting can become more specific.

The player requirements will now become very specific so that the minor differences between players of roughly equal calibre can be identified.

Step six - Observing games

When selectors are watching players they must constantly be referring to the positional requirements on which they are concentrating. This task is different from coaching. Selectors watch individual players. They should not be distracted from this by watching the match as a whole. This takes considerable discipline.

Individual players should be watched continuously for at least ten minutes. The selector must be able to observe play away from the ball as well as play when the player is directly involved in using, retaining or regaining the ball. This is more important for some positions than others.

When a selector is watching a player the positional requirements are a checklist to categorise information. All information should be recorded. This may be done by writing it down, though play can be missed while this is being done. An alternative method is to use a small voice recorder.

Both written notes and recorded information must be compared to the positional requirements. This ensures that each player for each position is compared using the same criteria. Selectors should watch players independently. This is to ensure they don't fall into the trap of simply supporting each other's point of view.

A major difficulty when selecting is reducing the number of players being watched so each can be watched for the maximum possible time. The categorisation of players into the "in", "out" and "unsure" groups helps with this. It enables you to concentrate on a limited number of players. This is a worthwhile method, though problems can arise when players take part in trials.

Prior to the naming of trial teams a considerable amount of work will have to be done gathering information on players. In a trial, comparisons can be made between two players competing for the same position. The difficulty is that there are 15 positions, all of which may have to be observed. Clearly this is impossible to do thoroughly. This can be helped by playing against an opposing team that is not in contention for selection. It reduces the number of players to be watched by half, but it is difficult to make comparisons.

At representative level and above, the problem may be solved by increasing the number of selectors available for the trials. The most obvious way would be to have a selector for each position. This would involve eleven selectors. Where there are two players playing in a position there will still be time enough to watch each player for at least 10 minutes. This frees up the official selection panel to watch individual players as they will know that there are selectors covering all positions.

For this to work successfully, the positional selectors have to be briefed in detail about the positional requirements. Once the trial is over, a debriefing of the whole group should take place before the official panel is left to make their final selection.

This system works well so long as the positional selectors are well chosen, understand what is required and are disciplined to watch the players rather than the match. When this is first done, all positional selectors may not be able to meet these criteria. However, at each successive trial the standard will improve as they become familiar with what is required. Changes may have to be made before someone who is good at positional selecting is found.

Step seven - Selection meetings

Regular selection meetings are essential to monitor the development of players. There are two types of selection meetings; those that take place prior to the selection of the team and those that take place once the team has been selected.

Pre-selection meetings
At the first meeting, the ranking lists of players by position, detailed in step four, should be written. By doing this, the panel has a starting point for selection. Considerable time should be spent discussing the merits of individual players before ranking them. This ranking should be reviewed at each meeting that follows. Changes must be justified.

These meetings have two further functions. The first is to categorise the players into the "in", "out" and "unsure" groups. The second is to identify players who need to be watched more frequently because the selectors have insufficient current information about them.

If positional selectors are used at trials they should be asked for their rank order and they must give their reasons for it. They must be prepared to be questioned by the selection panel about their rankings.

These meetings will highlight strengths and weaknesses. Because of this, aims, game profile and patterns of play may have to be revised. Secondly, they will enable you to focus on positional weaknesses. This may force you to select beyond the initial group of players, to cast your net wider.

Post-selection meetings
Post-selection meetings take place during the team's playing season. They will usually take place as soon as possible after a match, to select the team for the next match. It may not be possible to spend time discussing rankings each week. In fact this may lead to erratic selections that will prevent the team establishing its patterns of play as a unit. Ranking meetings should be scheduled to take place less frequently but regularly.

At meetings between each game it is most important to know of any injuries to players. It is important that a realistic assessment of the injury is made. The player should return to play only after total rehabilitation. It is equally important to ensure that the player is following a course of treatment that will ensure a return to play as soon as possible.

When teams are being selected it is important to justify changes to the initially selected teams. For a change to be made, the replacement player must have been consistently better than the incumbent. If this is not the case, but the change is made and proves to be unsuccessful, two players will have had their confidence damaged and the performance of the team will have been detrimentally affected.

Step eight - Priorities and consistency

Selecting to a game profile using the ranking system based on positional requirements to meet the game profile directs the selection panel to its own list of priorities. While the priorities for selection must always be subjective, the following may be useful for selectors in determining your own:

Priority	Selection criteria
1	Points-scoring ability
2	Possession-winning ability
3	Ability to maintain continuity
4	Decision-making ability (consistency).
5	Ability to perform basic attacking and defensive skills

Whatever method is used, the most important element of any selection method is consistency. So that the Game develops within a national Union, a provincial Union, a club or a school, the selection policy must reflect the game profile that has been developed.

For this reason it may be necessary to meet with all coaches and selectors and some players to work together on the game profile. If you involve all these groups in the formation of the game profile, they will feel committed to it. They must all be made to feel that they are part of the whole and not a number of parts belonging to individual teams.

Step nine - Attitude

Players competing for a position may be of equal ability. The strengths and weaknesses of a player may be balanced by different strengths and weaknesses of another. Selection in these circumstances will be based on which player fulfils the demands of the game profile.

But if the players still offer equal ability, the final criteria should be attitude. Even within this category are a number of criteria, e.g:
• commitment • determination • composure • reliability • concentration • persistence • compatibility • initiative

Selectors will know the value they may place on each of these. The emphasis should reflect what is needed by the team in that position.This will vary from position to position. However, it is likely that the attitude criteria for a position will be similar, if not the same.

Step ten - Intuition

It is at this stage, after the situation has been thoroughly analysed in a systematic way, that your intuition becomes important. You are dealing with a situation that involves people, not robots. Because of this, no selection can be entirely correct or entirely wrong. In a competitive situation, the reaction of players will vary from match to match.

After watching players for a long time, you will develop a feeling for the play of the player. The final selection will be based on you backing this feeling.

Conclusion

Selectors must be able to justify their selections to the players. This information allows players to identify their weaknesses, those factors that result in their non-selection, so that they can work on them.

Unless selection is carried out systematically, the selector's advice to the players will be vague and general. This will detrimentally affect the selector's credibility.

During the season, team changes will occur. A player who has been replaced should have been told what is expected prior to a match and what the faults were after the match. In these circumstances the player will know why they have been replaced. It should not be spontaneous and unexpected. Players are replaced when they don't perform the positional requirements to the required standard.

The player must be able to accept the selector's point of view. The player may disagree with the view, but the credibility of the selector lies in his willingness to tell the player what is required, what has not been achieved and to tell the player prior to anyone else knowing. The player has the right to know of non-selection before anyone else outside the selection panel and where possible, they should be told face-to-face, not on the telephone and certainly not through the media.

This aspect of selection is the most difficult. To reduce the effect of these difficulties, the selection process must be systematic, the player should be dealt with honestly and when the change occurs it must be handled personally and immediately. As a selector you must be prepared to be personally responsible for your own actions.

Skills required to be a selector

1. Knowledge of the Game

Selectors must understand how to use the following techniques:
• The principles of the game
• The principles of attack and defence.
• Key factor analysis.
• The principles of the Game's identities of play.
• Functional roles analysis.
• Positional requirements.
• Team profiling.
• Game profiling.
• Patterns of play.
• Game planning.

2. Practical knowledge of the Game

Can the selectors use their knowledge of the Game in a pragmatic way? Translating knowledge of the Game on to the field of play is one of the challenges for coaches, and so it is also for selectors. Different scenarios can arise. For example, the player base differs considerably between Hong Kong and Australia. Selectors of teams, where there is a small player base, may select the best players and use them in other positions rather than the player's specific position. Using knowledge of the Game in a practical way can be applicable to the team pattern, specific game plans, the venue of a tournament or tour, weather conditions, the condition of the playing fields and selection policy.

3. Time & availability

To be fair and equitable, selectors should be seen to be 'watching' games that allow players to display their abilities. They should be active in searching for talent. Contacting clubs or teams, working with coaches or reviewing relevant videos could achieve this. A considerable time commitment is required.

4. Purpose of selection

The selector must understand the team pattern and team game profile. Selectors need to understand 'what' and 'why' so they can decide on 'who' will be selected.

5. Understanding of the selection policy

The governing board of the rugby body with jurisdiction usually sets the selection policy. This will include eligibility criteria. Tournament organisers or other athletic boards can adjust the selection policy by changing the eligibility criteria. An example of this is the Asian Games. The Asian Games includes both Sevens and Fifteens rugby. The eligibility to participate at the games differs from the IRB regulations. Participants have to be of Asian descent or born in Asia and hold the relevant travel documents for the participating Asian country. Selectors need to be aware and informed of the relevant selection policy in order to select eligible players.

Difficulties can arise when selectors use the selection policy as either a guiding light or an iron rod to lead the selection process. Non-adherence to the selection policy may cause conflict with policy makers. A compliant approach to the policy may cause players to be grieved, as the selection of players may not be based on merit. Selectors should give feedback on the effectiveness of such policies and make recommendations.

It should be noted that selection policies could be used as a performance indicator for selectors – following the selection policy and giving appropriate feedback.

6. Personal profile system

The ability to identify the skills of the type of players you are thinking of selecting is a worthwhile skill as they will highlight strengths and weaknesses.

7. Attributes

- *Temperate* – During selection meetings remaining calm and focused. Allowing selectors to explore different ideas and options
- *Dedicated* – committed to the position so as to fulfill the requirements of a selector. Often, more time is required than is given credit for. Selectors may need to be willing to be the 'unsung heroes' of a Rugby programme.
- *Patient* – Rash decisions can be hard to justify and may plague the selection process and the selection panel throughout the season. Selection dates should be scheduled so as to avoid procrastination. Selectors should work out their own schedule to meet these dates. They should have the knowledge that it will take more than one meeting to select a team.
- *Integrity* – This is an important attribute in order to maintain respect. By identifying and outlining the selection process, the selectors are able to establish a foundation by using this as their basis of selection. The integrity of the selection process is maintained if the communication between the selectors themselves, the selectors and the governing board, and the selectors and the players is amicable, fair and effective. Selection dates should be clearly identified. What will be required and why should be communicated effectively to those who will be involved.
- *Sober* – When a wise and prudent decision needs to be made a sober approach is required. Stable selectors are vital assets. Selectors who are swayed by every trend or fad lack foresight and conviction to prudent selection goals.

8. Roles within selection panels

Most selection panels have similar features:

• A final decision maker (chairman or convenor of selectors)
• More than one person on the selection panel
• Coaching and non-coaching staff involved on the selection panel.

Identifying of roles within the selection panel is important. It establishes order. If these roles are not clear they need to be defined by a job description. If the panel member is not satisfied with the role or roles, that person may need to be released from the selection panel.

What to look for in players

When eligibility and the selection criteria have been established and the selectors have been identified, the selectors need to focus on their mission – to select the best players. The best players will have the following characteristics:

1. Skill – individual position, unit, decision making

To identify the skill of a player, a 'knowledge of the Game' is very important. There are various checklists that can be used to make an assessment off players. If used (in whatever form), it should be agreed and understood by the selectors.
The selectors should look for the Rugby specific individual skills that every player needs and then look at how they apply their skills to their respective positions, mini units, units, team. They should also display the relevant decision-making capabilities.

2. Physical conditioning relative to rugby and specific positions

Selectors need to look at the physical conditioning of the players. To achieve a competitive standard of play, conditioning is a key ingredient. A general guide should be given and, where appropriate, benchmarks set for players to achieve. Consideration should be given for 'position specific' conditioning. For example, a front row forward will require different types of physical conditioning than a player on the wing.

3. Attitude

An attitude that encourages teamwork while achieving individual goals should be sought. However, the selectors need to outline the type of attitude they expect and how they can identify the type of attitude they are looking for. Selectors need to have the time and availability to watch trainings or matches in order to recognise a worthwhile attitude.

4. Fulfill the team pattern, game profile

Can the player fulfill the team pattern? Is the player able to adjust to the game profile? This will be based primarily on the player's Rugby skill and physical conditioning with their attitude being an underlying factor.

An objective approach is good when determining if a player is able to fulfill the team pattern and game profile. The 'checklist' can help accomplish this approach. This allows the selector to present an unbiased report on a player or players to a selection meeting where it can then be subject to scrutiny.

5. Development versus achievement

Most teams play to win. With this mentality it can often be difficult to work on the development of players to ensure a team can have a good player base and continue to be competitive from season to season.

In countries where they have a competition that is close to the level the selected team will be participating in, developing players may receive appropriate opportunities. For example, a competition like the Super 12 may give more inexperienced players the opportunity to learn the skills necessary for International Rugby and to display them in competitive matches.

In situations where this is not the case, selectors may need to determine the outcome. Age is possibly less of a factor in today's Rugby world. Rather, the checklist on Rugby skills / physical conditioning, experience, fulfilling the team pattern and the selection goals should play the major roles in answering the 'development versus achievement' question.

Module 2 - Developing a team profile

Observation and analysis

Various methods can be used to analyse team performance:
• Notational analysis, live or from video, if you have access to appropriate game analysis software
• Making notes during a game.
• Accessing coded games.
• Using a voice recorder during a game and categorising the material afterwards.

Relying on memory is much less accurate, as recall tends to focus on selected events or highlights rather than more objective data gathered during the game.

Whatever method is used, the full value of game analysis is determined by its degree of accuracy.

Developing a team profile enables you to identify your team's strengths, weaknesses and needs. The needs may be the enhancement of strengths, the reduction of weaknesses, or a combination of both. These should be prioritised, as there is usually insufficient time available to meet all needs adequately.

The information used to develop a team profile is categorised into the principles of attack and defence. The principles are used consistently throughout this course as a standard point of reference for gathering information that can be easily understood and show clear links between each of the steps in the process.

The principles of attack and defence are in sequential order and in order of priority. You may choose to develop your own principles of attack and defence, so long as they are:

• outcomes
• sequential
• prioritised.

For the purposes of coach education:
Attack is defined as when a team is in possession of the ball.
Defence is defined as when the opposing team is in possession of the ball.

Note that this differs from Law education, where:
Attack is defined as when a team is in their opponents' half of the field.
Defence is defined as when a team is in their own half of the field.

The principles of attack and defence

Principles of attack
Gain possession to
go forward with
the **support** of team mates to
maintain **continuity**
applying **pressure** to
score points.

Principles of defence
Contest possession and
go **forward**
applying **pressure** (by tackling) to
prevent **territory** being gained (quality of tackling)
supported by or in **support** of team mates to
regain possession (a turnover) and
counter attack.

On the following pages is an example of the types of protocols that may be used to develop a team profile, followed by an actual team profile derived from video analysis of a major team. These examples are intended to be used as a guide only.

PRINCIPLES OF ATTACK

Principle	Protocols
Gaining possession	Scrums, lineouts, kick starts and restarts only. • Does your team gain possession or not? • At kick-offs and re-starts, your team has the ball and is, therefore, in control of play. You can make a kick that is recoverable or one that is not. This will occur when you go for territory. In this situation you will go from attack to defence immediately and the principles of defence will then apply.
Going forward	This refers to the method used by the team in taking the ball forward by any combination of running, passing and kicking. • Once possession has been gained, is the next contest for the ball at the tackle, ruck or maul over the initial gain line? • From each successive contest, is the subsequent contest for the ball over the gain line from that contest? • If a kick is made, it will usually cross the gain line. If the kick is recovered, attack will continue but if it is not, a turnover will have occurred and the principles of defence will then apply.
Supporting	Support refers to how the ball carrier uses team-mates to take the ball forward after the initial attack from the set piece. • Are the pace of play and options adversely affected by a lack of support? • Are the pace of play and options adversely affected by the ball carrier not being able to use the support that is available?
Continuity	So that the analysis is precise, continuity refers to phase play, i.e., rucks and mauls only. The purpose of each is to recreate the space that has been used in the initial attack so that there is the time and space to continue. While the creation of lateral space is less common in the contemporary game, linear space, space down the field is created by the re-drawn offside lines. • When your team has the ball and forms a maul or a ruck, does it win the ball?
Pressure	Pressure is an abstract term but it refers to those things that reduce an opponent's defensive options, thereby enabling the attack to score. Pressure is based on the attack being in possession, having a field position as close as possible to the goal line and playing at pace so that the defence has insufficient time to recover. • Possession - see gaining possession • Field position - use a field plan to plot the position of each restart of play in order to identify field position. • Pace - use a subjective assessment of the team's ability to maintain the pace of play.

Turnovers	• Turnovers are the link between attack and defence. Obviously a loss of possession is a huge disadvantage and regaining possession an advantage.
	• In this course the term turnover refers to the following actions:
	  - the attacking team putting the ball in touch and conceding the throw-in to the opposition
	  - the attacking team infringing such that the opposition has the throw-in at the scrum
	  - the defensive team regaining possession in general play, e.g., catching a kick, intercepting a pass, winning a tackled ball, etc.
	• The attacking team conceding a free kick or a penalty kick.

PRINCIPLES OF DEFENCE

Principle	Protocols
Contesting possession	While the team may not regain possession by contesting the ball, the quality of the possession enjoyed by the opposition can be reduced, enabling the remaining principles to be more effective. • Did your team win possession from the scrum, line-out, kick start or restart? • Did your team challenging for possession result in the attacking team's options being reduced?
Going forward	Reducing the time and space that the attack has to be successful. It applies to players going forward collectively to a pattern so that individuals are not isolated and easily beaten. • When the opposition wins the ball, do your players go forward as a unit, keeping a well-formed defensive line? • Is the attack stopped before it crosses the gain line after scrum, lineout, ruck or maul?
Applying pressure	Having reduced time and space, the next task is to tackle. • How many tackles were attempted? • How many tackles were completed? • How many tackles were missed?
Preventing territory being gained	Increasingly, the nature of the tackle is becoming critical - does the tackle reduce the opposition's options? The answer to this can be based on whether or not the tackle stops the ball carrier. Tackles can be rated according to the following scale: • 1 point - ball carrier able to offload in the tackle. • 2 points - ball carrier is able to drive on through the tackle before it is completed. • 3 points - ball carrier is unable to go forward. • 4 points - delivery of the ball is delayed allowing the defence to be reset. • 5 points - turnover.
Support	Support occurs when team mates assist to complete the tackle and/or begin actions to regain possession. • At the point of contact, is there support that at least slows down the opposing team's recycling of the ball?
Regaining possession / turnovers	Possession may be regained during play and secondly when there is an infringement and the team is given the initiative to re-start play. • In general play, how many times does the defensive team regain possession of the ball?
Counter attack	Once possession is regained, the team will counter attack and the principles of attack will apply. This can be measured by whether the team is further down the field at the conclusion of play after they have regained possession.

Example of a team profile

PRINCIPLES OF ATTACK		
Principle	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
Gaining possession Kick starts and restarts Scrums Lineouts	**Lineouts** • The team has multiple options at 4, 5, 6 and 7. **Kick starts / restarts** • The team has a good chase pattern led by 7 and 5 • Accurate kicking from 10, 12 (DC), 15 **Scrums** • All Black tight five • Accurate and able to apply pressure to meet the needs of the go forward option	**Lineout** Throwing accuracy
Going forward Gain-line in attack from set pieces and phase play	• Physical ball carriers 8, 4, 2, 6, 7 • Organised systems based on the team having settled personnel • Strong 10 – many kicking options and a threat to defensive line with the ball in hand • Constructive use of space by midfield • Recognition and use of space from whole unit	• Midfield size and ability to breach the attack line • Top end speed from outside backs
Supporting Role of ball carrier and support players	• Organised systems • Strong sub units – loose forwards, back three • Multi-skilled players who understand and can perform a range of dynamic roles	• Lack of depth in certain positions, e.g., the back three

PRINCIPLES OF ATTACK		
Principle	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
Continuity Post-tackle Ruck Maul	• Well-established systems / structures at the post-tackle, ruck and maul • The whole team understands and can accurately perform the dynamic roles at the post-tackle, ruck and maul • The team achieves a 85-90% ruck completion rate	
Applying pressure Possession Field position Pace	• The strong 10 creates both kicking options and is also a threat to the defensive line with the ball in hand • The team is able to perform long range threats by attacking some way from the goal line because of its ability to support in numbers • The team recognises space and is able to use it • All players can contribute to the leadership of the team	• Possible kicking options outside 10 • Lack of top-end speed
Scoring points	• Long range threats from whole team unit • Accuracy • Patience / leadership / experience • Historical success creates an aura that intimidates the opposition who play with less commitment in attack because of the likely consequences of a turnover	

PRINCIPLES OF DEFENCE

Principle	Strengths	Weaknesses
Gaining possession Kick starts and Restarts Scrums Lineouts	**Lineouts** • Defensive pod organisation • The speed with which the pod adjust to the actions of the opposition **Scrum** • The scrum has the ability to disrupt the opposition scrum **Kick starts / restarts** • Two catching pods • The team has strong ball carriers who return the ball well • Either immediately or after phase play the team has multiple options from kick receptions • Sound organisation based on decision makers at 10, 15	• Catching pods can be too shallow and have to move back to the ball allowing the opposition to move into them
Going forward Patterns at scrum, lineout, tackle, post-tackle, ruck and maul using the gain line	• Organised defensive line / structure • High density closer to the source of possession • Understand dynamic roles in the defence line • Trust and belief in all members of the unit especially the players inside them in the defensive line	• Catcher can get isolated
Applying pressure Tackle success	• Defensive philosophy is to prevent penetration, create frustration in the opposition and force them to play outside their skill set from which we can gain a turnover • Achieve this by defending inside out and tackling the legs with the inside defending attacking the ball	• Around 13 who rushes up creating a dog leg in the line • Catcher can get isolated • Much of this depends on the selection of 10 and 12
Preventing territory being gained Tackle effectiveness	As per applying pressure	

PRINCIPLES OF DEFENCE		
Principle	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
Supporting Complementing the tackle and play that follows	• Quick and accurate support in defensive contact • Initially aim to slow down ball but overall aim is to gain a turnover • Second defender effectively pressures the ball • Trust and belief in all members of the unit	
Regaining possession Turnovers gained	As per supporting Based on understanding of dynamic roles on defence	
Counter attacking Progress made down the field	• Multiple skilled threats - polyvalence? • Understanding and completion of team systems • From kicked ball spread the defence to isolate defenders and penetrate the chase line by one-on-one evasion • From close quarter turnovers move the ball quickly to space before going forward	• Depth in back 3
Score points	The team's success over the years, especially at play following turnovers, tends to make opponents tentative in their own attack.	

These examples provide coaches with an idea of what should be included in a team profile. It is just one, but it is very sound method of developing a profile of a team. The team profile is used as a basis for developing the game profile, the first step of which is to rank strengths and weaknesses according to the order in which they need to be addressed. This ranking can be a mix of both strengths and weaknesses.

By addressing weaknesses, the team can improve in order to be on a par with other teams. This is a priority in gaining possession as without the ball it is difficult to perform successfully.

Once strengths have been identified, it may be possible to enhance them even more through effective coaching and practice. This can have the dual effects of enabling the team to play better and, at the same time, lessen the impact of obvious weaknesses. For example, a team that can dominate possession may be able to use this ability to compensate for deficiencies in their ability to use the ball and in defence.

With the exception of gaining possession, a team that develops its strengths will generally be more successful than if it works on its weaknesses.

Prioritisation applies when the time available is limited and the range of options has to be restricted to the modest skills of the players in the squad. Skilled and fit players will enable the team to develop a greater range of options so that they will be able to be more specific and accurate in their tactical plan to play against particular opponents. Less fit or skilled teams will have fewer options and it may be best to have them practise and play to relatively limited patterns of play that fall within their capacity. Also it should be remembered that options in the mode of play are determined by the quality of the opposition. In most situations, the weaker the opposition, the greater the options; the stronger the opposition, the fewer the options.

To provide details for the team profile, the principles of the game's identities, key factor analysis and functional roles analysis can be used. By providing categories and checklists, notational analysis can be used to provide statistical data. The subjective interpretation of this data by the coach creates a very detailed team profile.

Team aims

The aim of this course is to enable you, the coach, to produce and implement a programme that enables your team to meet its aims. This aim will be the measurable result that is achieved over a particular period of time.

Outcome aims

The outcome aim defines what is to be achieved. The measurable result referred to may be to win a test match or a particular game, to win a number of matches, or to win a competition or a tournament.

For some teams it may be to win a proportion of the matches they play in a season or up to a particular stage, e.g., the first round to qualify for the play-offs in a season or a proportion of wins over a number of seasons.

Implied in the measurable result is the time period, or number of games to be played in which to achieve the result. This may be one match as in the case of a test match, three to four matches as in the case of a tournament or test series or many matches over many months, as is the case in leagues and national championships.

As with all aims, the aims for a team must be SMARTS aims. This mnemonic stands for:
S = Specific to the team in its competition
M = Measurable
A = Achievable - neither too difficult nor too easy
R = Relevant - to the composition of the team, i.e., the team profile
T = Time - over a given time period
S = Strategies - to achieve the aim.

To decide what the aims of the team will be, it is necessary to analyse the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the team in a team profile.

Performance aims

In the past we have used outcome aims only. However, recently we have become aware that performance aims should be the basis upon which the team's planning takes place. This is because the team in its play has some control over its performance aims, while it has little control over the outcome aims.

As a result, by analysing your team, using the team profile, you should be able to define specifically the aspects of the team's performance that will produce a successful result for your team. This may not result in the team winning, but will ensure a degree of satisfaction if the team has performed to the standards that it has created for itself. This is based on the need to control the controllable, and clearly the team is more in control of its own performance and less of the outcome of the game.

Examples of performance aims:
• To win all our throw-ins at scrum and lineout in all games.
• From possession at scrum, lineout, ruck and maul, to break the gain line 50% of the time.
• To gain at least five turnovers at the post-tackle in all games.
• To establish momentum by breaking the gain line and quickly recycling the ball at 60% of the post tackle situations when we have the ball.

Module 3 - The game profile

Overview

The game profile is the team's outcome goal for its on-field performance. It explains what the team has to achieve in its play in order to be successful.

The game profile is based on the team's profile and is structured in the same way, i.e., there are separate game profiles for attack and defence and the categories for each are the principles of play for attack and defence.

Depending on the context for the game profile, not all the principles will have applicable outcome goals. For example, in attack, gaining possession and going forward will generally have outcome goals, but there may be no outcome goals for the others, such as when a team is trying to get out of its 22 metre zone. In defence, the team may contest possession, go forward, tackle and support, but may have to wait for a few tackles before an opportunity to regain possession presents itself.

The attacking game profile

The attacking game profile may be based on:
• field position
• the positioning of the opposing team.
It need not be based entirely on one or the other, as these dimensions are complementary.

When devising a game profie, the field can be divided into distinct areas in which the team can attempt to achieve the best outcome from their play. The field can be divided into:
• zones down the field
• lanes or channels across the field.

An attacking game profile may be further subdivided based on a number of variables. Examples of these would be a profile based on field position, and the positioning of the opposing players.
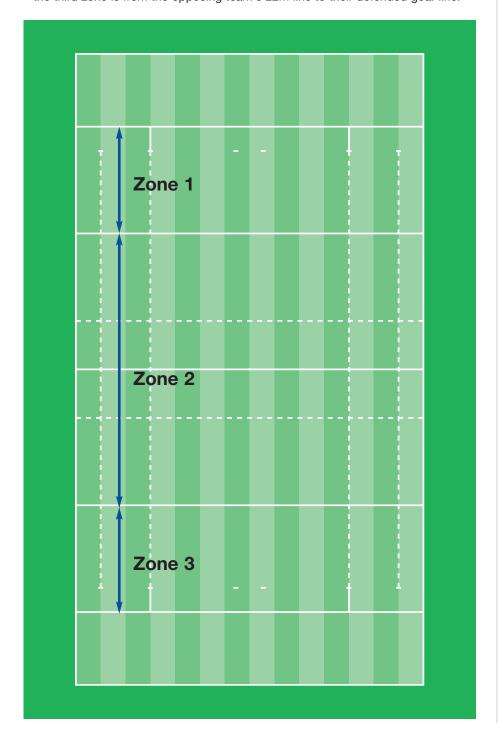
While going forward follows gaining possession in the sequence of play, the decision about how exactly to go forward determines much of the detail around the gaining of possession. Therefore, it is best to decide what has to be achieved in going forward, and then formulate the plan for the gaining of possession, before moving on to the other principles.

Lateral game profiles

This game profile is based on zones down the field. Within each zone, the team plays to space across the field. For example:

• the first zone is from the team's defending goal-line to their 22m line
• the second zone could be between the 22m lines
• the third zone is from the opposing team's 22m line to their defended goal-line.

Zone 1

Zone 2

Zone 3

The lateral zones

Zone 1, from the team's defending goal-line to their 22 metre line:

- The basic option for this zone is to kick to touch on the full so that the team achieves a field position at the re-start further down the field.
- This gives them more time and space to react to an attack at the re-start should they not regain possession on the opposition's throw-in to the line-out.
- While this option may not always be used it is likely to be the one used when the team is under greatest pressure.

Zone 2, between the 22 metre lines:

- In this zone the team has the maximum range of attacking options because of the space available to them both down and across the field. The main restriction to their play is the inability to gain territory by kicking the ball out on the full.
- They have the full width of the field and can use the contests for possession to create congested areas around the ball resulting in space being created elsewhere, as well as space down the field created by the offside line and the need to defend kicks into space behind the initial line of defence.

Zone 3, from the opposing team's 22 metre line to their goal line:

- The reason for this being a separate zone is because the downfield kick option is less available and the opposing team can concentrate more on defending across the field. As a result attacking options are limited, modifying the mode of play.

An example of a pattern of play based on lateral zones answers the question of whether the number 15 or the wing will tackle the ball carrier in attack beyond the number 13.

The chosen pattern is based on the ease with which support players are able to defend on the extremities of the field. Some prefer the wing to stay out and defend the last player in the line nearer to the goal line. Elsewhere on the field the wing may move in to tackle the ball carrier leaving the players on the outside to number 15. Number 15 then uses the touch line to assist in stopping the attack.

This is by no means universal and it may be best to have one tried and proven approach throughout the length of the field.

If you are using zones down the field, a sound technique is to give each zone a theme to provide players with a focus. An example of themes is:
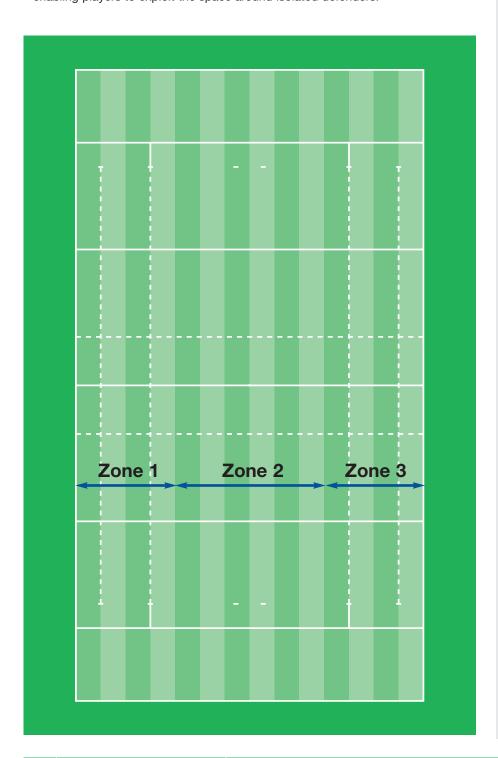- Goal line to 22 metre line: Theme - 'Exit zone – get out of here'
- 22-metre line to 22-metre line: Theme - 'Building momentum to create opportunities'
- 22-metre line to goal line: Theme - 'Strike to score'.

Linear game profiles

This game profile is based on lanes across the field. Within each lane the team plays to space down the field. For example:

• the grouping of players at scrum and lineout creates space across the field enabling players to exploit the space around isolated defenders.

The linear zones

A further division can take place in lanes across the field with the game profile being based on the amount of space to the left and right of the source of possession. The choice is affected by a number of factors, including:

- **Principle – go forward**
  - This is based on the ease with which play can be made to the right from scrums when passing and using the number 9 and back row combinations.

- **Principle – continuity**
  - The need to vary the phase play pattern using the driving maul to create space to attack into and the ruck to obtain quick possession to use the space that is immediately available.

- **Principle – go forward**
  - Placing kicks into space so that the receiver has to use the less comfortable kicking foot and will perhaps therefore fail to achieve the same distance or accuracy.

  - These linear lane patterns are not as deliberate as the lateral zone patterns but they are valuable in gaining a competitive advantage as the team will know where the attack is to take place.

Game profiles based on the position of the opposing team

The attacking game profile may also be based on the positioning of the opposing players.

- **Principle – go forward**
  - Most fundamentally, if the defence is bunched the ball should be passed wide so that the attack can run around them. If they are spread out then the ball should be carried into and through them to either score or to create space on the outsides if the defence comes in.

- **Principle – gain possession**
  - Positioning of opponents at line-outs.

- **Principles – go forward and support**
  - Positioning of opponents in defence.
  - Attacking alignment patterns.
  - Defensive alignment patterns in general play at mismatches.
  - In general play by groups of attacking players, being more numerous in one area of the field than the defending players, creating an overlap.

Example game profile -
Crusaders, from Super 14 2008

PRINCIPLES OF ATTACK			
Principle	**Zone 1** **(goal line to 22m line)**	**Zone 2** **(22m line to 22m line)**	**Zone 3** **(22m line to goal line)**
Gaining possession Kick starts and restarts Scrums Lineouts	Set piece, solid and stable so that the easy / simple options can be performed to clear from the zone 1	**Lineouts** Quick ball delivery, often 'off the top' ball using a variety of catching options **Scrums** Promote the side of the scrum from which the play will be launched	**Lineouts** Quick ball delivery, often 'off the top' ball using a variety of catching options **Scrums** Promote the side of the scrum from which the play will be launched
Going forward Gain-line in attack from set pieces and phase play	• Kick directly to touch or for distance with a planned chasing pattern • If the ball is untidy tidy up using carrying and phase play options before using the kicking option	**From lineouts** • Use midfield carry options to penetrate or get the ball over the gain line and mount the next attack from phase or support play **Scrums** • Number 8 to carry the ball forward to attack on the near side or wide out based on the positioning of the defence **Turnover** • Move the ball laterally to space before going forward **Kick** • Use kicking options to kick to space both down and across the field	**From lineouts** • Use the drive option both near the goal line to score or further out to draw in the defence and create space laterally in the attacking line so that the strike move is likely to penetrate **Scrums** • Attempt to score from 5m scrums using options both around the scrum and wide out **Turnover** • Move the ball laterally to space before going forward **Kick** Use kicking options to kick to space both down and across the field.
Supporting Role of ball carrier and support players	• Have a patterned chase line for when we kick and a receiving line for return kicks • Have a support pattern for the ball carrier that meets the needs of the go forward game profile should this option be used	Have a linear and lateral support pattern for the ball carrier that meets the needs of the go forward game profile	Have a linear and lateral support pattern for the ball carrier that meets the needs of the go forward game profile.

PRINCIPLES OF ATTACK			
Principle	**Zone 1** **(goal line to 22m line)**	**Zone 2** **(22m line to 22m line)**	**Zone 3** **(22m line to goal line)**
Continuity Post-tackle Ruck Maul	Ruck rather than maul ball preferred for recycling ball and creating space	Ruck rather than maul ball preferred for recycling ball and creating space	Ruck rather than maul ball preferred for recycling ball and creating space
Applying pressure Possession Field position Pace	**Priorities:** • Take the ball forward • Kick to the space created • Remove time and space using an organised chase line	**Priorities:** • Retain possession • Quickly recycle the ball • Repeat phase play to build pressure by gaining territory after each phase • Use the lateral spread of the field to create the greatest range of options to go forward	**Priorities:** • Retain possession • Quickly recycle the ball • Repeat phase play to build pressure by gaining territory after each phase • Use the lateral spread of the field to create the greatest range of options to go forward

Defensive game profiles

Of the variables used to develop game profiles, the most relevant for defensive game profiles is the positioning of the opposition. So the task is to take the most frequently occurring situations and to explain what the team is to achieve from each of them. There may be much in common between these situations.

The main situations are:
• scrums
• lineouts
• receiving kick-offs and drop outs
• mauls
• tackle and post-tackle / rucks
• phase play in which the attackers are more numerous than the defenders
• phase play in which the defenders are more numerous than the attackers
• chasing and receiving patterns from kicks both initiated by your team and initiated by the opposition which includes counter attack

Remember that the defensive game profile identifies what the team is to achieve and not how it is to be achieved (which will be explained in the patterns of play).

While defensive plans may vary to some degree, they are largely based on the common outcome of regaining possession of the ball. One example of a defensive game profile that may be fine-tuned to meet individual need could be:

• Establish a structured pattern.
• Contest the ball to reduce attacking options.
• Create delay to allow the defensive pattern to become re-established.
• Apply pressure by reducing time and space to erode the attack and regain possession.

Specific defensive game profile examples

Example 1 – from a scrum, it is the aim of the team to defend both sides of the scrum, reducing the opposition's attacking options so that there is a contest for the ball as far as possible on the attacking team's side of the gain line, or they are forced to use the kicking option, resulting in a turnover.

Example 2 – When possession is conceded, by kicking the ball from field positions in which territorial gain is more important than retaining possession, your team must chase to a pattern that reduces the opponents' run, pass and kick options, enabling your team to secure a better field position at the next stoppage in play.

In practice, it is unnecessary to produce a defensive game profile for each of the defensive principles of play because they follow sequentially with little variation. The defensive principles of play are used as the checklist for the defensive patterns of play as they provide a framework to explain how the game profile is to be achieved.

Defensive game profile elements common to all field positions

PRINCIPLES OF DEFENCE			
Principle	**Zone 1 (goal line to 22m line)**	**Zone 2 (22m line to 22m line)**	**Zone 3 (22m line to goal line)**
Contesting possession	• Pressure opposition set pieces • An exception to the rule is to have a specific play at lineouts 5-10m from the goal line to contest the rolling maul.		
Going forward	Organise the defence line using the key factors for defence: • High density close to the source of possession • Defend inside out • Retain alignment, line speed, etc • Meet the opposition ball carriers on or before the gain line.		
Applying pressure	• Make an offensive tackle that limits the ball carrier's options. • Make sure the whole team buys in to a 'no breach' policy that prevents penetration and creates the opportunity to regain possession as opposed to making big hits that don't create turnover opportunities.		
Preventing territory being gained	• Team aim is for the first tackler to prevent territorial gain. • If the first tackler does not complete this, the second tackler should do so. The second tackler has a crack at getting the ball.		
Supporting	• With the tackle completed, the first support player attempts to regain possession or at least delay the opposition recycling. • If possession is not regained quickly, reorganise using the phase system assuming their functional roles. • Communicate to ensure the pattern works well.		
Regaining possession	• Force turnover or prevent ball recycle = free kick to your team. • Commit to the tackle and the post-tackle, attack the collision area, use counter rucking.		
Counter attack	React to both the space in front or the width available based on field position and the positioning of team-mates and the opposition.		

Types of game profile

Few game profiles are comprehensive enough for all aspects of the game. By dividing the game profile into an attacking game profile and a defensive game profile, the game profile is better understood.

Step 1 – I see
I am in a position to see what is happening, in particular, I am in a position to read what team-mates and opponents in the vicinity of the ball are doing.

Step 2 – I understand
Upon observing the situation I am able to read the cues, understanding what the best option is to either apply maximum pressure or reduce the defensive pressure of opponents.

Step 3 – I act
Having understood who is doing what, the player can then execute the best option.

This may be to pass to a penetrating player, to reduce defensive pressure by kicking the ball down field, to achieve a better field position or to take the ball forward to regroup at ruck or maul recreating space for another attack.

Step 4 – I react
Every action creates a reaction and the exploitation of pressure applied initially in attack will create a further reaction by the defence.

The variables here are very numerous and often unpredictable and yet it is from this play that subtle reactions to the defence result in points being scored. The skill is not in reacting to the initial situation but in reacting to the ever-changing situation as things change and change again.

The coaching of initiative in these situations cannot be prescriptive apart from making the players aware of a few general principles, such as:

• Attack space in the gaps between defending players or the space behind some defenders and in front of others.
• If there is no space, create it by evasion.
• Be sure that the space you create is the space the player is moving away from and not that the player is moving into. The ball carrier is like a magnet attracting defensive players. Consequently the direction of running draws defenders in that direction, leaving space where these defenders have been drawn from.
• Be able to put the ball into this space.
• Pass only to a team-mate in a better position than yourself.
• Commit at least one defender before passing.
• Pass to the space in front of the receiver so that the receiver can accelerate forward upon catching the ball.
• If a pass cannot be made, retain possession, go forward but avoid isolation and use the space created by the off side lines at ruck and maul to create time to remount the attack.

Module 4 - Patterns of play

Overview

Once the team has a game profile, it is time to work on how to implement it.

The patterns of play describe how the outcome goals, identified in the game profile, are to be achieved. For consistency, they are based on the principles of attack and defence and whatever subdivision has been used in the analysis of the game profile, i.e., field position and the positioning of opponents. The patterns of play are the basis of the achievement strategies used to prepare the team at practice.

Patterns will exist for all of the principles of attack and defence.

Principles of attack	Pattern of play	Principle of defence	Pattern of play
Gain possession	Kick starts and restarts Scrums Lineouts	Contest possession	Kick starts and restarts Scrums Lineouts
Go forward	Forwards, backs and combined attacks from scrum, lineout and phase play	Go forward	Defensive patterns (going forward together) at scrum, lineout, tackle, post-tackle, ruck, maul and from kicks in set play and general play
With support	The role of the ball carrier and the role of support players	Apply pressure	Pre-tackle Tackle
Maintaining continuity	Phase play Post-tackle, rucks and mauls	Prevent territory being gained	Tackle effectiveness
Pressure	The use of field position, possession and pace in combination	Supported by or in support of team-mates	Support in completing the tackle, slowing down the opposition's re-cycling and regaining possession
Score points		Regain possession and	Getting the ball back • Throw-in at scrum and lineout • Penalty / free kick when without possession • Regaining posssession at kick starts • Regaining the ball at the tackle, from the kick and in general play.
		Counter attack	Progress made down the field from the turnover

These patterns and the options that the patterns create will be how the team plays against most opponents during its matches.

The patterns may involve the whole team but it is more likely to involve the backs or the forwards or any of the smaller combinations that may form a mini-unit, especially during dynamic field play.

The details of various standard patterns of play are based on the analytical techniques outlined in previous courses i.e., functional role analysis and key factor analysis.

Patterns create options, and by choosing the best option the team achieves its outcome goal for that identity of play (lineout, scrum, second phase, attack, defence, kick starts and support).

This is because in playing to a pattern successfully, the opposing team is forced to react to counter the pattern. Their adjustment will create an attacking option elsewhere which can then be used to continue to achieve the outcome goal.
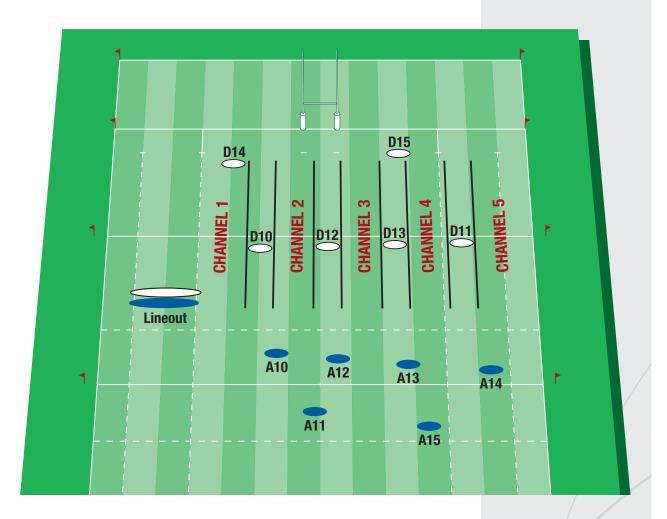
Examples of attacking patterns of play

For both scrum and lineout, the attack begins with the sources of possession, scrum and lineout, creating an advantage for one team by engaging their opponents in the contest for the ball. This means that the defending forwards are less able to assist their back line in defence.

What follows builds on this notion of advantage and offers some patterns of play that can be used to trigger successful attack.

Diagram 1: channels of attack

Note: The static channels shown above are dynamic so that if a move attacks channel 1 and draws players into that channel, then a new channel is created in the space from which players have been drawn.

Back line attacking patterns

In back play, more than any other aspect of the Game, patterns create options, so that two or three patterns can be used to create a number of options. Through the reading of the movement of the defence, the ball can be passed to the unmarked player, who can penetrate. This player might not score, but by drawing defenders to the ball, space for continuity is created elsewhere to enable further progress to be made down the field.

The players must know and be able to perform the pattern, and to read the behaviour of opponents to execute the best option by either taking the gap and/or passing to a player who is in space, once the defence has been drawn away from the space.

1. Blind side play patterns and moves to the right

Two examples of the use of the blind side are shown in the following diagrams. Any blind-side move must be based on the width that is initially available. However, once the gain line has been broken, passing technique can be used to create greater space. In both these examples, the first receiver receives the ball, moving away from the defending number 6.

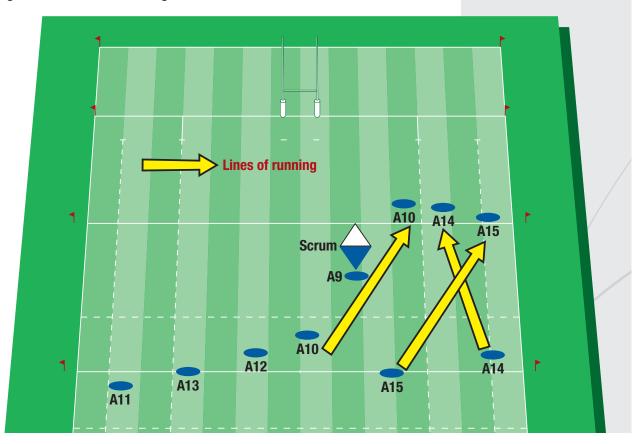*Diagram 2 - number 10 running the blindside*

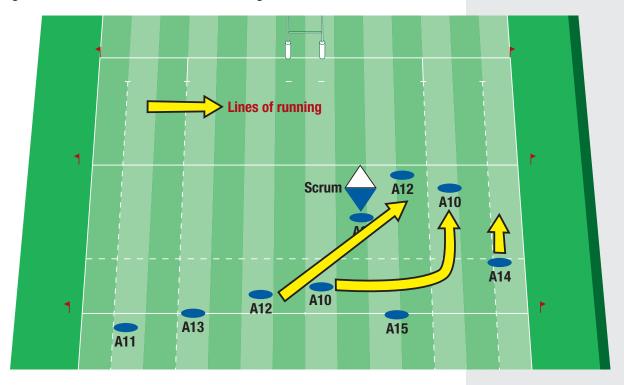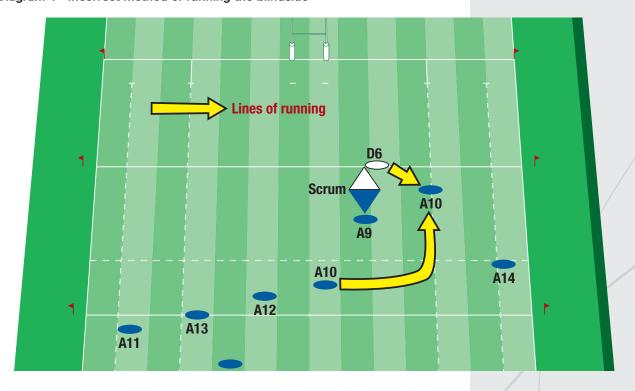*Diagram 3 - number 10 and number 12 running the blindside*

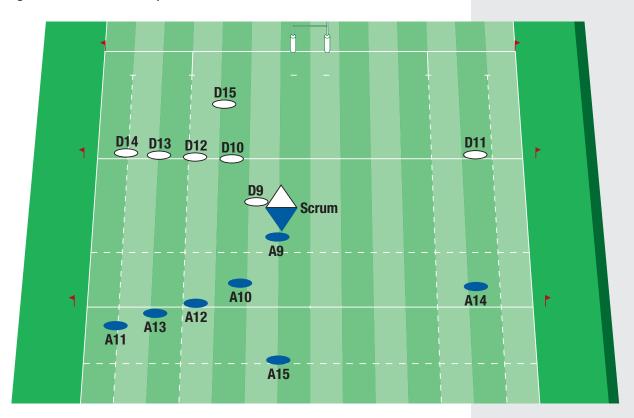*Diagram 4 - Incorrect method of running the blindside*

Because the first receiver, here the number 10, runs on an arc, time is created for defensive number 6 to move forwards to make a tackle.

2. Overload patterns

In this pattern, the initial positioning of the attacking players is aimed at drawing the defence away from the space that may be used. If they do move, one set of options becomes available and conversely if they don't, another set of options becomes available.

Diagram 5 - Basic overload pattern

From this pattern an option can be used to attack the opposition. As can be seen from the positioning of players, the usual open-side back line is positioned on the blind side and the usual blindside is on the open-side. The opposing defensive players will react to this in a number of ways. It is by observing what these ways might be and then using an option that exploits them that an advantage is given. Some of the most likely changes in positioning of the defenders are:
• number 9 to move to the right
• number 10 to move to the right
• number 15 to move to the right
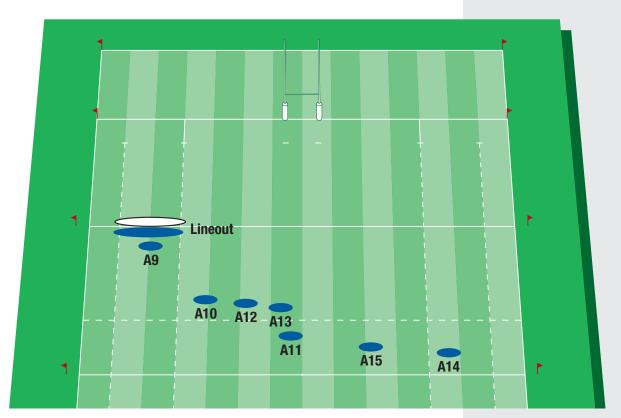• number 8 to pack on the outside of number 7 on the right hand side of the scrum.

Each of these changes in position by the defence offers running, passing and kicking options that will result in the line being broken or even a try being scored. It is up to coaches and players to develop these possibilities.

3. Three-on-three pattern (use of second wave)

This pattern can be used from a lineout and also from a scrum close to a touchline. The pattern uses all the backs on the open side, in two waves of three players. The first wave is made up of numbers 10, 12 and 13, and the second of number 11, 14 and 15. The aim is to increase the number of players that can be used in attack, to confuse the defence. The positioning of the number 14 depends on how reliably the forwards are able to win their own lineout or scrum ball.

Diagram 6 - Initial formation of three-on-three pattern

Some options that may be used are:
- Use all the backs with numbers 14, 15 and 11 coming into play outside 13.
- Numbers 14 and 15 to enter the backline in the gaps between the 10, 12 and 13.
- Various miss passes from 9 to 12, 10 to 13, 10 to 14, 12 to 14 or 15 outside 13.
- Numbers 9, 10 and 12 to double round the player to whom they have passed, to either run through the gap into which they are running or pass to the second wave of numbers 14, 15 and 11.
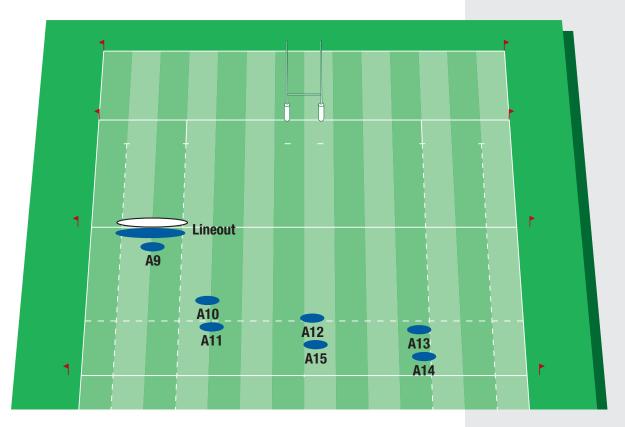
All these options are based on creating more attackers than defenders and passing the ball to a space being entered by an unmarked attacking player. This may be on the outside of the defence or in gaps between the defending players.

4. Doubling up

This pattern can be used from both lineout and scrum, although from scrum it removes the blind-side option. The pattern was developed as a consequence of the increasing need to play through the defence, rather than in front of it, until a space is created.

Diagram 7 - Initial formation of doubling up pattern

There are many variations. The effectiveness of the pattern is in deciding what the likely behaviour of the defence is and passing to the unmarked player when this occurs. To be able to do this, much practice is needed and by playing to it in matches, players will learn how effective the pattern can be.

5. Attacking stacked defensive patterns

A stacked defence pattern is one in which the number of defenders exceeds the number of attackers. The point of attack will determine the number of players who will group at one point in the attacking line. The Laws prevent this from occurring at scrum and lineout, consequently they are most likely to occur at play following a tackle.

The task of the attack is to penetrate through the defence by moving defenders out of space to reduce the number in the screen. This can be done in a number of ways, all or which have one principle in common. All attackers must threaten the defence by playing in and through it. If the attack plays in front of the defence, it will merely shuffle across the field to make for a more effective defensive tackle when the ball carrier attempts to penetrate.

In many ways, it is the opposite of set-piece attack in which the ball can be moved laterally to space before it is moved forward as space does exist. Here there is the need to attack the defence by going forward in a linear manner to create space and then to quickly use this space by passing laterally to the space before penetrating.

6. The maul

If the ball carrier stands 'in the tackle' ensuring the ball is off the ground, a maul can be established with quick support that seals the ball off by blocking and binding past the line of the ball. This is followed by quickly getting the ball to a link player back from the line of contact. Even if the initial impact of the opposition drives the maul backwards, further support should prevent this. The mobility of the ball off the ground will enable the maul to be rolled around the pressure point and forward momentum established.

Whatever defence is used, it will force more defenders to get involved, creating lateral space for an attack. So long as the ball is delivered before the maul becomes stationary, this advantage will be retained, creating attacking opportunities.

The forward-moving maul moves the defensive screen back as a unit, so space is created for the back line attacking unit.

7. Kicking options

Strong tacklers and greater numbers in the defensive line may prevent the attacking team from going forward. The kick may have to be used. These kicks may be:
• recoverable, made down the field to initially sacrifice possession for the gain of a better field position; these may take the form of an up and under, grubber or chip
• long kicks into space, with a chase to tackle the opposing ball carrier.

Correcting faults in back line attack

It is best to isolate each major cause of a problem and use the key factors as a checklist when correcting faults.

Common fault 1: alignment too deep

Method of identification – upon receiving the ball

• Pass the ball through the hands from half back / scrum-half to centre.

• Use a defensive centre to break 'fairly', i.e., within the Laws, from a position in line with where the hindmost foot would be. If the attacking centre receives the ball more than 4 metres from the defender, alignment is starting to get too deep. This is a rule of thumb and can alter with the speed of the centre, but most centres should be able to receive and give a pass within 3 metres. If, on the other hand, the centre is receiving the ball and the tackle at the same time, the alignment is too flat and the back line should either align deeper or pass more quickly. Lineout alignment will be different when ball is delivered without the lineout moving from the line of touch. Here there will be greater distance between back-line players. Players inside the number 13 will have to use their lines of running to commit the defence so that 13 defended by only one defender.

The object is to try and move the ball as flat across the pitch as possible. To get too deep allows the defence to shuffle across with play so that more than one defender can concentrate on the ball carrier.

Confusion may arise if you demand that passes are made close enough to the defence to prevent the defence from drifting across field. To meet this demand the back line may stand flat initially. This flat formation means that any forward movement is slow or the back line may even be static. Whatever the situation, the defence will not be greatly challenged. It is better to stand deep, run onto the pass and receive the ball flat with enough time and space to react to the defence.

Method of correction – initial depth

Having done the check as above, mark the point where the centres meet, i.e., the tackle line, at the centre. This is usually between 4 and 10 metres back from the gain line. If the attacking patterns concentrate outside the centre, passes need to be made before this point. Depth can be reduced for moves off numbers 10 and 12.

If the contact point is greater than 10 metres back from the centre line, the problem may be alignment or slow hand speed. Wide back play and loose forward support will be difficult as each backward pass takes the ball further from the gain line.

One way to reduce the depth of alignment is the miss pass. This must be done close to opponents while at the same time preventing an interception. If the miss pass is done too far from opponents, the defenders of each missed player will be able to drift onto the receiver. This may turn an overlap into player-on-player defence, or even give the defence an advantage.

The main problem that has to be corrected to reduce depth is slowness of hand speed.

Passes made by inside backs should only be carried for one or two paces before being transferred on. The difference in the time taken between the pass of a good and average half back can be up to one second. In that time the opposite centre could have run up to seven metres, thereby forcing the back alignment that much further back if they are to execute the same move. If the number 10 is a half-second too slow then up to 10 metres is lost.

Players may take a pass close to the defence. However, by passing back to a deeper receiver, and not flat, they will both commit the defence and re-create space for the receiver. The receiver must align in anticipation of this occurring to gain time to react to the changing situation.

More efficient passing in order to reduce the defence's reaction time is the key to reducing depth of alignment.

• If the centre is carrying the ball too far, then move up a few paces. As long as creeping doesn't occur the moves can work.

• If opposition backs are slow coming up (often at ruck ball if they are a player short) then adjust the depth to suit by standing flatter.

• If shallower alignment is achieved, an improvement in the loose forward's play will occur. As they support the ball carrier they will have less distance to run and may even be able to run directly forward to the ball without having gone back initially.

• Initial alignment may be deep. Commitment is created by the backs using this depth to move into their passes, receiving them flat. This creates commitment by the defence. The pulled back pass creates space for the next receiver.

From lineout possession

Initial alignment need not be any further back than the attacking offside line, as the back lines are already 20 metres apart as dictated by Law. When ball has been delivered immediately off the line of touch, the back line should move forward quickly, moving as soon as the ball leaves the catcher's hands, while still retaining their alignment in relation to the players inside.

The number 10 receives the ball approximately four to five metres back from the advantage line, taking advantage of the 20 metres of space. The centre will now receive the ball very close to the gain line. When this is performed with skill the tackle line and the gain line are the same.

A further option is a flat miss pass from number 9 to number 12 made very close to the gain line, giving number 12 time to receive the ball. This can be very effective in creating forward movement.

So long as hand speed is fast, alignment upon receiving the ball can seldom be too flat. However, players with slow hand speed will lose confidence and 'choke' when they receive the ball, not passing it and running into contact. The pass will not clear the space and 'crash' ball will result. Practice keeping alignment and improve handling through intensive, opposed practice.

Common fault 2: width of alignment

Method of identification - alignment too wide

This can usually be identified when lateral space becomes cramped for the outside backs caused by laboured passing, by players heaving rather than passing the ball, usually off the weak hand and by players running sideways before making the pass. All these actions concede space to the defensive line and the ball carrier will be tackled well behind the gain line.

Method of identification - alignment too narrow

This doesn't happen often. The width of alignment can be altered to try and catch out the opposition. In the same way as standing wide can create space between defenders by spreading them, narrow alignment can be used to group defenders creating space outside the number 13.

Weather conditions and the lack of ability of players to pass with their weaker hand can reduce width. For left handed players, the weaker pass will be to the left and for right handed players the pass will be weaker to the right.

Practising progression to maintain correct alignment

Step 1
Use cones to mark each of the attack, tackle, gain and defensive lines and have the players practice to them.

Step 2
Practice re-aligning by attacking along one of the lines across the field, i.e., 22m line, half way line, or 10 metre line. When the ball reaches the last receiver, have the players put the ball down on the line and re-align to it. No player is allowed to cross the line with the ball, it is the imaginary tackle line but they must run straight and not across field to avoid breaking the line. You can simulate the opposition by aligning with a designated playmaker who must receive the ball 3-5metres from you to create commitment and put a penetrator into the space.

Step 3
Establish a drill that forces the backs to re-align from balls in different parts of the field or to re-align running in different directions. See the 'Around the cones' drill that is explained in the IRB Level 2 Coaching manual.

Step 4
Practice against defenders initially, with one defender defending the playmaker and adding in more defenders as the players improve. The defenders should vary the key factors of alignment, width and depth forcing the attack to adjust to each situation. Deeper alignment or closer alignment may be necessary off the weaker hand.

Remember that it is the aim of all back line attack practices to initially identify and then use the space. The next step is to create the space and then use it. This means that the number in defence must be fewer than those in attack so that space is available to be recognised and used. Initially it should be obvious where the space is by the defence being predictable and progressively less so.

Common fault 3: cross-field running

Method of identification

During the game, it is difficult to identify the extent of cross-field running from the side of the field. It is best to watch the game from the end of the field.

A symptom of the inside backs running cross-field is when the open side wing receives the ball beyond the outside goalpost from lineout possession.

Why players run across the field

- This may be inherited from junior rugby when players are allowed to run across and around opponents.
- Players are more comfortable when opponents tackle side-on rather than front-on.
- It allows more time to run, therefore more time to think.
- Players run across in the act of passing, forcing outside backs across the field. They may be running to support before they have passed the ball.
- Players are trying to run into space and have difficulty straightening up.
- Players don't appreciate that it is better to hold the defence and pass into space, rather than run into it.
- Players may run across the field deliberately to create space in the opposite direction.

Why players should not run cross-field

- It uses up the lateral space of the outside players.
- It makes backing up more difficult as outside players keep running further away from the supporting players.
- It is difficult to make an outside break and the inside break is easily covered by inside defenders who have been drifting across.
- It forces penetrating players towards their designated tackler instead of forcing the tackler to have to make the decision as to who to tackle and when to react.
- It makes drift defence easy.
- Carrying the ball is a slower method of moving the ball sideways than passing.
- Legitimately players may deliberately drift across field and pass back into the space from which they have moved the defence.

Golden rule

"The space that is created for penetration by a team mate is the space the player(s) has just moved away from and not the space they are presently running into."

Players must appreciate this rule so they can identify the space and be skilled at passing into it.

Common fault 4: creeping

Method of identification

Creeping forward prior to receiving can be spotted by looking for a player receiving the ball on the hip with the chin on the shoulder, i.e., the pass is received to the side of the player not in front.

Reasons

- Leaving too early and causing the ball to be received on the hip. This slows down the speed of passing as the ball takes time to be passed around the body. This enables the defence to come forward and the playmaker hasn't enough time to distribute the ball.
- This problem is caused by players thinking they will get left behind as the back line moves forward. They may lack confidence in their speed.
- Coaches are often to blame by having their backs practicing unopposed, thereby allowing the inside backs to run too fast and too far.
- Often the passer causes the outside players to creep by 'firing' bullet passes that don't allow the receiver to run onto the ball. This forces the receiver to stand flat in order to receive the ball.
- The receiver over-compensates for a lack of pace by initially standing flatter in the space and secondly by leaving too early.

Solutions

Back lines often creep forward by moving when they think the half back / scrum half is going to get the ball instead of when it is passed. They should move together, holding their alignment and moving onto their pass. The ball should be passed 'sympathetically' with some 'hang time' on the ball so that the receiver doesn't anxiously flatten up but is able to accelerate towards the ball. In addition, the passes should be pulled back, re-creating the space that has been used up by the passer. The receiver must be given confidence by the passer that the pass made will allow alignment to be maintained.

Common fault 5: passing to the player

Method of identification

If creeping has been corrected and players are still receiving the ball on the hip then the passer may not be putting the ball in front of the receiver.

Reasons

1. The passer thinks that criticism will result if ball goes to ground in front of the receiver. When players were younger and unable to run quickly they would have passed to the player. Consequently they find it hard to adjust to passing into the space in front of the receiver.
2. They feel a need to visually identify the receiver before making the pass. Sound and sight must be used, not just sight.

Solutions

• Players run in formation throwing the ball out of the reach of the receiver but with 'hang time' on the ball. The receiver accelerates to receive the ball and a 'perfect' pass results.
• The receiver should call for every pass. This lets the passer know the receiver is in position and wants the pass right away. This removes the need for the passer to totally identify the target visually. It also reduces the need to 'rush' the pass once identification has taken place because less time will be needed.

Practice to overcome the problem

The best practice to overcome the problem of passing to the player is to have players pass along the back line with only the half back looking to pass. The others must not look at all and the receivers must call at the moment the hands of the player inside receives the ball. After continually doing this, players in a game will look as they pass, not before. By going into the pass before visually sighting the player, they pass to the sound by sympathetically passing in front of the receiver.

Common fault 6: telegraphing Play

Method of identification

Players telegraph moves by behaving so that their positioning and body language can be read by opponents. There are various ways that players telegraph their intentions to the opposition.

Headswing

- The big headswing and visual identification that was mentioned in the previous fault also telegraphs the player's intention to pass and identifies the intended receiver. This results in the defender knowing the player won't make a break and enabling this player to drift out one to defend the next player or in the line.
- Most of the 'headswingers' are unsure if the defender is still committed as the pass is being made as they are looking in the direction they are passing to.
- 10s and 12s, because of the need for more arm action or the need to stop when throwing a miss pass, telegraph moves early. The defence will immediately drift creating a gap, which is seldom taken by the passer.

Altering position too early

- If a full back or blind-side wing are standing in the back line when they are supposed to be the extra player. The player must come into the line from behind, generally from the normal position or from behind the playmaker.
- Players outside the space to be used to penetrate shouldn't move out to make room for the penetrator too early. This is best done as play develops so that the defender is caught in two minds whether to defend the penetrator or the next player in the line.
- The penetrating player should run into the space into which the ball has been passed as late as possible, reducing the defence's reaction time.
- The line of running should be from inside or outside the space that is being run into, not from directly behind it.
- If a defender is in or has moved to the space the ball must be passed to the player left free by the behaviour of the defensive player moving into the vacant space.
- The penetrator must receive the pass close to the passer so that the player is as far as possible from the next defender in the backline.

Common fault 7: entering the back line too early

Method of identification

When the extra player comes in too wide, this indicates that the ball is being passed too early. The player is forced wide to make penetrating space because early passing has given the defence sufficient reaction time. This will result in the penetrator running towards a defender, the defender will not have to come in to defend, i.e., the defender will not be moved out of space.

Back moves are designed to either penetrate or outflank the opposing team's defence. If the defender comes in early to tackle the extra player, this frees the next player in the back line. The ball should be passed directly to this player, missing the designated penetrator. The receiver now becomes the penetrating player.

Delivery of the pass must be made at the last practical moment and the playmaker must have 'held' the opposite defender by not looking for the penetrator. If the playmaker's defender moves to tackle the penetrating player, the ball carrier is free to 'dummy' pass and go through the gap that has been created.

Conclusion

These are some of the problems and, while they may be basic, it is the basic ones that are the most frequently committed. Isolate the problems and cure them one at a time.

The success of back line moves has little to do with their complexity. Success lies in timing, 'sympathetic' passing, reduction of the defence's reaction time and, above all, practising the ball carrier's ability to 'read' the situation and decide on the correct passing option.

Practices that focus on the development of the individual skills will result in moves happening intuitively. This is something that practising a host of moves as a back-line attacking unit will not do.
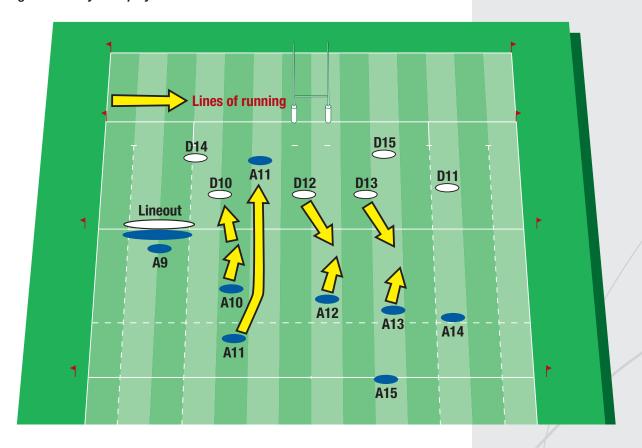
Defence patterns

Should we defend 'player on' or 'player out'?

Most teams will have a standard defence pattern. Any change to this pattern must make the pattern more effective. This can be done if the opposition gives the defence more time and space to react to the behaviour of the attack. They do this by being slow or by operating too far from the defence, or both. An example of a defensive team that uses this space effectively is one that changes from 'player-on-player' defence to 'player-out' defence as the initial attack develops.

If the attack has the skills that enable them to operate close to the tackle line the time and space will be less. The defence's reaction time will be limited and there will be little time for adjustment.

However, if the attack performs a move some distance from the defence the defence will be able to adjust from marking the initial ball carrier to the next player in the backline, i.e., they will be able to move one out.
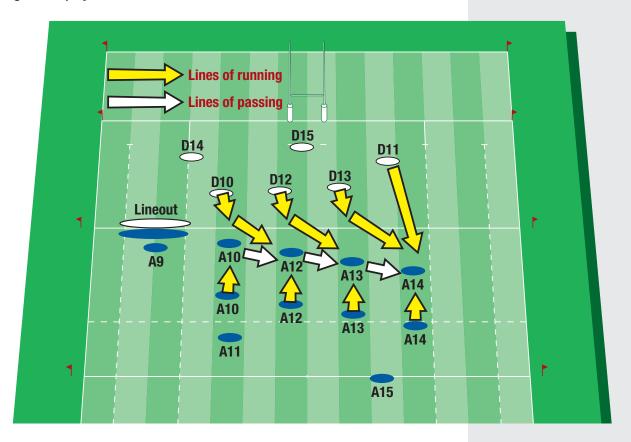
Diagram 8 - Player on player defence

In this example, the defence has little time to adjust and the number 11 is able to penetrate.

Diagram 9 - player out defence

In this example, the defence has time to adjust and move out. Number 10 moves to tackle number 12 because the attacking number 10 passes the ball too soon. This allows number 12 to tackle number 13.

Defensive teams can create this space by not moving forward too quickly.

While some attacking players may recognise that they should move forward before passing to commit the defence, others will not. They will pass early and allow the defence time and space to adjust. This is particularly important from play in which the attack may have more players than the defence. If there is sufficient space to the goal-line the defence can hold its alignment allowing the attack to react and, if they pass too soon, the defence can move 'player-out' to counter these extra players.

If the attacking player does draw the defender the team is no worse off and still has its defence pattern intact.

Outside-in defence

To defend 'outside-in' is contrary to most advice. This is because in moving in to defend, space is created where the tackler has moved away from. This space is further from other defenders. Defending 'inside-out', on the other hand, affords the attack only one direction to go and it is the direction to which all other defenders are moving. However, this principle of defending inside out is made on the assumption that the ball carrier is aiming to pass the ball into the space and that another defender will not come in and defend the space.

A stacked defence pattern has reduced attacking options to either 'pick and go' down a channel or the first receiver crashing the gain line. Because the defence is numerous, the space left by defender defending outside-in will be occupied. Secondly, in crashing, the ball carrier's prime intention is to gain ground followed by retaining possession for the team. The ball is unlikely to be passed.

Progress is made because players ahead of the ball carrier have driven past the ball creating a ruck. By driving the opposition back, space is created behind, enabling the next player to pick up the ball and go forward. Tacklers have difficulty moving into their tackles because the space directly ahead is blocked. Even if a tackle can be made, it is difficult to get low enough to complete the tackle, and to force the release of the ball.

Players may equally well be blocked from coming from inside but are seldom blocked from tackling outside in. This enables a low tackle to be made. So long as the opposition are attacking using one-off first receivers and crashing forward, outside-in defence offers a good option.

When the attacking players recognise that by coming in, lateral space has been created, then the defence, probably the backs, must quickly adjust and tackle inside out.

Patterns of play: restarts
1 - Kick starts

Overview

The aim at the kick start is to regain (or gain) possession of the ball, or to gain territory (or prevent it being gained). Short high kicks at kick-offs and drop-outs are designed to regain possession, while long kicks, made as far down the field as is permitted in Law, are designed to gain territory.

The aim is to chase hard, to a pattern, making contact with the opposition as soon as possible. By tackling and creating contests for possession the eventual aim is to regain the ball.

If the opposition chooses to return the ball by kicking, possession will be more easily regained, but usually, the field position will not be as favourable.

Functional roles

1. Kicker (kicking team)
2. Jumper / catcher (both teams)
3. Lifter (receiving team)
4. Sweeper (both teams).

1. Kicker

Key factor - kicker	
1	Restart with sufficient height on the kick to enable the ball to be recovered or with sufficient accuracy so that the team is as far inside the opposing team's territory as possible.

The aim of the kicking team is to recover the ball once it has been kicked. To achieve this, the kicker should kick the ball high enough so that the catcher has time to get underneath the ball and catch it.

This type of kick is difficult. The accuracy of the kick is affected by the firmness of the ground and the weather conditions. In conditions in which the ground is soft, or there is a following wind, a long kick could be the better option.

Among the options are:

• To kick to an opposing forward behind the majority of forwards in the opposition team. The player to aim towards is usually one standing just outside the 22 metre zone. Remember, the ball cannot be kicked to touch on the full from outside the 22 metre line. Fast chasing players may be able to tackle the catcher. Once tackled, the player will have few supporting players behind who can immediately move to support. The player's team-mates will therefore have to move back before they can move forward. Even if a pass is made to a player inside the 22m zone, this pass will take time. Both situations will allow the kicking team to apply pressure. Possession will either immediately be regained or the team will throw the ball in at the resulting lineout.

• To kick deep into the corner and, using the fastest players, chase the ball so that the return kick is hurried and therefore lacks distance. The chasing pattern should channel the kicker down the touch-line, thereby reducing the angle for the kick. Whichever option is taken, the aim remains the same - to regain possession of the ball. This may be achieved either by running and catching the ball or forcing a touch kick that concedes the throw-in at the resulting lineout.

2. Jumper / catcher

	Key factors - jumper / catcher
1	Play to a pattern as a mini-unit.
2	Be in a position to move toward the ball.
3	Contest the ball by jumping and turning inside the flight of the ball and back on to opponents.
4	Catch or deflect the ball to team mates.

Kicking team
This role will only be of any relevance if the kick is a recoverable one, rather than one for which the plan is to concede initial possession and apply pressure in the hope of winning the throw-in at a lineout.

Players from the kicking team should angle their run from the touchline so that they are running infield towards the ball. This enables them to see the ball clearly throughout its flight.

As they leap to catch the ball, they will be able to turn in the air with their back towards their opponents.

If the ball is caught this way, the catcher will land in a strong position to protect the ball. If the ball is deflected it will be knocked backwards and team-mates will be able to recover it.

Receiving team

With the increasing range of kicks being made, the initial positioning of the catchers is very important. If the catchers are standing directly under the ball, they will be beaten to the ball by their opponents jumping and catching it. The catchers should be deep enough to move towards any kick landing outside the 22m zone.

The catcher may have to move some distance to catch the ball. Because of this, it will be difficult for the supporting lifters to work with the catcher as a mini-unit. Varying positions down the field rather than across it may solve this. Two catchers could stand one behind the other, the first at 15-18 metres from the half way line, and the second on the 22m line. This will minimise their movement and the players lifting the catchers will be able to perform their role.

The catchers in the receiving team should also turn towards team-mates as they jump. If the ball is caught they will then be in a good position to set up a maul. If the ball is not caught cleanly, the deflection should be back to team-mates and not knocked forward.

3. Lifter

Key factor - lifter	
1	Pair up with a jumper / catcher and assist that player into the air to catch the ball.
2	Provide stability for that player while catching the ball.
3	Ensure a safe return to the ground for the catcher.

The technique is similar to lifting in the line-out. However, support can be immediate assisting the catcher in the jump for the ball.

The player must move with the jumper, positioning behind, to the flight of the ball. When lifting the player should give maximum height and stability by being in a crouch, side-on to the opposition, and locking the arms at full extension. The player should anticipate impact and brace to absorb it, binding onto the catcher and forming a block on one side as a maul is formed.

4. Sweeper

	Key factor - sweeper
1	Position to recover deflected ball from the jumpers directly in front or behind.
2	Be prepared to become the ball carrier
3	Upon receipt of the ball, choose the best available option

The sweepers are the players who are ready to recover the ball if it is not caught but deflected towards them. If the ball is caught, their role changes quickly as they move to form a ruck or maul or take up positions to run, pass or kick the ball. Because phase play is not normally formed immediately after a deflection, there is no offside line. For this reason a sweeper can take up a position ahead of the ball to field the opposition's deflection.

Another role these support players perform may be that of runner. In this role the half back will make a short pass to the runner who has been standing off the ruck or maul. By bursting onto the ball, the player aims to break the gain line and initiate forward momentum. This can be very effective if the blind side is open. To avoid this potential means of counter attack, the kicking team should aim to put the ball as close as possible to the touchline, so that they do not have to defend both sides of the ruck or maul, should possession be lost.

Analysis of kick start patterns

The kicking team

Short kicks

Possession can be immediately regained from drop-outs and kick-offs by kicking the minimum distance required in Law. This is 10 metres for kick-offs, and just across the 22-metre line for drop-outs.

To recover the ball, the kick must be high enough to give players time to contest the ball. To achieve this, the full width of the field should be used. This way the ball can spend sufficient time in the air, but will travel only the minimum distance forward, so that it can be contested.

Positioning to contest the ball

To contest the ball team-mates should stand closer to the touch-line than the position the ball is likely to arrive at. This enables the players to run towards the ball. A direct line of running or one inside the position of the ball results in the ball moving away from the catcher which is a more difficult catch. When kicks are made to the centre of the field this is the case. The kick has to be higher enabling the catcher to position when jumping to catch the ball. It also gives opponents more time to adjust.

The catcher will have to leap into the air to catch the ball ahead of opponents and in doing so they should turn so that they are between the opposition and the ball. As the kick is challenged the ball may be deflected. Turning the body helps prevent a knock-on.

Support players should position both on their side and their opponents sufficient distance away to react to deflections. Deflections are usually directly forward of or behind the contest for possession.

It is a good idea for one player to be given the role of tackler, if the opposition take the ball cleanly. A low tackle creates a contest and prevents the opposition setting up a maul.

Options

Players need not all be on one side of the pitch. By splitting the players, the opposition will be forced to adjust. In their adjustment, they may create a mismatch in the attacking team's favour.

Another option is to kick high and short down the centre of the field. If the ball is recovered, both sides of the field are available to attack, but, of course, if not, the opposition has the same advantage. Prevailing conditions may determine the success of this strategy, as a team playing into the wind and attempting to get out of their own territory by kicking, may have difficulty.

Long kicks

Long kicks down the field aim to gain territory, maybe to be inside the opposition's half at the next stoppage with the team who took the kick start having the throw-in.

In all cases the favoured kicking foot of the opposition's most likely kickers should be considered. If they are right-footed the kick should be made to the kicking team's left and if left footed to the kicking team's right so that the angle for a return kick is narrower and less distance can be gained.

Options
Two options are available. The first is to kick deep into the corner so that most of the receiver's team-mates are in an offside position in front of this player. This carries some risk of kicking into the in-goal.

The second option is to kick so that the ball is caught just outside the 22-metre zone. A kick cannot be made directly to touch so, f the player runs, he/she can be tackled to contest for the ball. If the player passes to a team-mate inside the 22-metre zone, this takes time, enabling the kick to be challenged. Also since ELV law amendments, this kick cannot be made directly to touch which prevents the opposition from gaining ground this way.

The chasing pattern
Key to the success of a long kick is a chasing pattern, the aim of which is to channel the opposition down the touchline. Therefore, players chasing down the centre of the field should be ahead of those nearer the touch-line.

The orthodox aim is to force a kick to touch as close to the opposition goal-line as possible, thereby achieving good / better field position and having the throw-in.

Kick-off patterns

The key factors of kick-off patterns are explained in lower level courses. Some of the patterns that may be used by the kicking team are:

1. Kicking to the opposite side of the field to space behind the open-side wing.
2. Making a high kick behind the front line of the receiving team that a player may be able to run onto and catch or a very high kick just beyond the 10 metre line and anywhere along the line so that it is contestable.
3. To target a receiver who is standing just outside the 22 metre line so that the ball cannot be kicked directly into touch. The kick should be high enough to reduce the time the player has to react. Usually the player has forwards in front so they are not available to support. Pressure can result, with the ball being put into touch, the throw-in by the kicking team.
4. To kick deep into the corner and use the fastest runners in the team to sprint after the ball and apply pressure. Pressure is applied by the chasing pattern cutting off in-field running and passing options and encouraging the player to take the space down the channel alongside the touchline.

The receiving team

Receiving short kicks

By anticipating the side of the field to which the ball will be kicked, the ball winners, most likely the forwards, can position themselves to regain possession. This is most important for shallow kicks, because there is little reaction time available.

Kicks made further down the field give more time and space for an option to be chosen.

By being behind the likely position of the ball, players are in a position to move forward to perform their role. If they are too shallow and the ball goes behind them, they will have to go back to support before moving forward. This takes time, and will give the opposition an advantage.

Catchers must be back from the position at which they wish to catch the ball so that they can move into it and don't absorb the pressure of opponents who are running forward. To create space for the catch, the team can position further back, especially if the opposing kicker is using their position - rather than the 10-metre line - to judge the distance on the kick.

To cover most situations, one catcher should position on the touch-line to move forward to the 5-metre line and the second on the 5-metre line or between the 5 and 15-metre lines, to move forward to the 15-metre line. If the kick is made down the centre the position of the number 7 should enable this player to move into the ball.

Support

Each catcher should have a lifter who assists them in the leap into the air and provides stability for the catch and recovery. Other players should be positioned to react to deflections / knock-ons.

Once the ball has been recovered it is most likely that phase play will result, the effect of which is to draw the defence in to contest the tackled ball or stop the maul. This will create space for an attack.

If the kick creates a blind-side, it should be used, as the possible disorganisation of the defence will enable the attack to break the gain line. When they are eventually stopped, the defence will be drawn out of the centre of the field creating space there for an on-going attack.

Receiving long kicks

Long kicks may also result in phase play, and the creation of space, for the same reason.

A kick into touch will concede the throw-in. A team may prefer to kick the ball downfield and chase. Near the touch-line this kick is usually performed by numbers 9 or 10, and maybe number 12 who may also have the option of the near touch or the far side of the field depending on the position of the opposition.

Patterns of play: restarts
2 - Scrum

Aim

To deliver the ball to the half back from a stable protected position so the team has the greatest range of attacking options.

Scrum overview

Scrummaging is more than a re-start of play, it is the ultimate unit activity of the Game. It requires immense strength, good technique, accurate timing and complete cohesion between all the players involved.

When a team is dominant in the scrum, that team tends to dominate other phases of play such as rucks, mauls, tackle/ post-tackle, lineouts and kick-offs. A dominant scrum can:

1. Set off backs into space with a few extra seconds to attack.
2. Manoeuvre the opposition loose forwards away from the ball accentuating this advantage.
3. Give the backs the momentum to go forward, leading to faster and cleaner post-tackle and ruck possession.
4. Put the opposition attacking backs on their heels and hinder their ability to use a multi-pass attack. Thus, their attack will become more predictable and easier to defend.
5. Wear down the opposition forward pack, making them less effective around the field.
6. Create confidence in the whole team.
7. Develop a psychological advantage over your opponents.

These advantages are magnified since the post-ELV May 2009 law changes in which the offside line at scrum for the defensive team is 5 metres behind the number eight's feet.

The key factors of the skills of scrummaging were covered in the Level 2 course. This course focuses on the patterns of play from the scrum and the functional roles of the scrum.

Functional roles

1. Deliverer
2. Hooker
3. Props
4. Pushers
5. Channellers
6. Link player

1. Deliverer / scrum half / half back

	Key factors - deliverer / scrum half / half back
1	Be ready before the scrum has engaged.
2	Use calls to co-ordinate the throw-in with the application of weight and the hook.
3	Direct the channelling and delivery of the ball.
4	Provide a link between the backs and the forwards to implement the best attacking option.

The role of the deliverer

The deliverer is typically the number 9, though the number 8 can take the ball and initiate continuity or link to other players.

The scrum half should arrive from the opposition side of the scrum to facilitate movement to the back of the scrum. Throwing the ball in quickly and moving to get the ball out quickly will relieve the pressure on the scrum. The number 9 co-ordinates the throw-in with number 2 in order to co-ordinate the push by the whole scrum, so that the throw-in, hook and push all occur at the same time. After the hook, the ball must be channelled so that it can be played by the number 9 without the number 9 being tackled by the defensive half back. The ball must be kept in the scrum until the number 9 is ready. The left flanker and the number 8 must guide the ball through the scrum as directed by the number 9. To protect the number 9 from the opposite number, the ball should be played from the tight-head side of the number 8. Any pre-planned attacking option from the base of the scrum will usually involve the number 9.

The ability of the players in the scrum will usually determine what pattern of play has the best chance of success. Typically, the deliverer's primary role is to pass the ball to the backs in such a way as to provide space and time to attack.

2. Hooker

	Key factors - hooker
1	Co-ordinate scrum assembly and engagement.
2	At pre-engagement, determine the distance from the opposition and alignment.
3	Bind comfortably but firmly with the props.
4	Bind at the armpits over the props' shoulders.
5	Prior to engagement, have the right leg ahead of the left to provide stability. To win the engagement, releases this leg quickly bringing it back in line with the left.
6	Control the opposition hooker through the right shoulder.
7	Face the deliverer as much as tight binding allows.
8	Co-ordinate the throw-in and the strike with the deliverer.
9	Strike the ball to deflect it between the loose-head prop's legs. (Many scrums do not strike but prefer to have all eight forwards push past the ball.)
10	Clear the ball so that it is behind the front row.

The role of the hooker

It is the hooker's responsibility to win the ball and, therefore, to co-ordinate the scrum assembly and engagement. The hooker should take up position at the assembly point and take the crouched position from which they will engage. If the front row assembles standing up, the crouch then has to take place between assembly and engagement. By assembling in a crouch, this movement becomes unnecessary and those behind will not have to adjust. Crouching after assembly pushes the locks down and back, thereby loosening bindings and resulting in the players losing their balance.

The hooker has to choose the engagement target, which will depend on which team has the throw-in. If the opposition has the throw-in, the hooker will typically target contact with the sternum of the opposing hooker which exerts force driving the opposition back. On the hooker's own team's throw-in, the hooker should typically target just below the left shoulder of the opposition tight-head prop. This gives the hooker maximum flexibility to hook the ball.

After engagement, the hooker is responsibile for retaining possession and initially channelling the ball back. In order to maintain possession and provide a platform to enable the development of the succeeding pattern of play, the hooker must assume a pushing position after the hook in order to maintain the forward pressure within the scrum.

3. Props

The functional roles of the two props are slightly different:

	Key factors - tight-head prop
1	Anchor the scrum.
2	Hit, sink a small distance and drive forward applying constant pressure.
3	Apply pressure through the right shoulder.
4	Maintain constant pressure.
5	Bind over the top of the opposing loose head onto the back or side.
6	Drive the right arm into engagement by keeping the elbow tucked in and "punching" the arm directly forward. Don't engage using a swimming action that exposes the player's chest.
7	Upon engagement the feet should be shoulder width apart and square.
8	Push straight and not up as this exposes the player to being driven back.
9	Keep the neck short and the head in the neutral position.
10	Operate in conjunction with the other front row players.

	Key factors - loose-head prop
1	Hit up, and in, upon engagement.
2	Bind strongly with the hooker.
3	Upon engagement bind under the opposition tight-head.
4	Bind with either a long or short grip, depending on individual preference.
5	Keep the head above the hips.
6	Upon engagement, the feet should be shoulder width apart and square.
7	Pack under the tight-head prop's chest using the right shoulder.
8	Keep the neck short and the head in the neutral position.
9	Operate in conjunction with other front row members.

The roles of the props

Foot position

The foot position that offers both stability and forward momentum is with the feet shoulder-width apart. The alignment of the feet is a matter of personal preference so long as the player is balanced, stable and able to exert power. The body position is more stable when they are further apart and more powerful when they are slightly closer together. The adjustment will depend on scrummaging tactics.

In order to promote the hooker in the engagement in the direction of the throw-in, the loose-head's right foot should be behind the hooker's left foot.

While maximum force will be generated if the prop's feet are square, the player may over balance and fall forward on engagement. To overcome this, the outside leg may be slightly in advance of the other. However, if the advance is too great, the body position will be compromised.

Engagement

For consistency the tight-head prop typically leads the engagement after the referee's call using body language to trigger engagement. This usually means that contact is made by the tight-head first. The front row will then be angled so that the hooker is facing the ball on the team's throw-in. This is not essential when the contest is a pushing contest and not a striking contest.

Upon driving up into engagement both props bind onto the body of their opposite number.

Upon engagement, the tight-head prop should shrug the right shoulder and keep the outside arm up to create as small a target as possible for the opposition loose-head.

The tight-head binds over the top of the loose-head on the inside with a straight arm as far down the back of the loose-head as possible. The arm should stay straight and high throughout the scrum. The target for the tight-head is either the sternum, the join between the loose-head and the hooker or just under the left shoulder of the hooker. Targetting the sternum means that all the power is generated through the opposition, pushing them back, while the other two options are onto less stable areas and binding may be loosened.

The tight-head aims to maintain the height of the scrum at a height that the hooker finds comfortable and the opposing hooker finds less so. In addition, the tight-head drives forward by driving the knee down and forcing the hips forward.

The loose-head has the left arm up to bind quickly, with a bent arm binding on the outside onto the back of the opponent, ideally binding between the shoulder blades. The loose-head prop's target for engagement is the sternum of the tight-head.

The loose-head prop must drive up and through the opposing player so that the scrum cannot be lowered. Any downward pressure the tight-head may be able to generate with the arm can be negated by:

• taking a short grip binding onto the armpit of the tight-head and bringing the arm back to the side to shorten the arm, preventing downward pressure
• taking a medium grip as close as possible to the opposing prop's collar to stop the downward pressure
• taking a long grip binding on the back of jersey, turning the palm out.

It has become current practice for loose-head props to be the 'chunkier' prop rather than broad shouldered so that, even though only one shoulder is engaged there is not a wide outside shoulder that the opposing tight-head can manipulate to gain an advantage.

A scrum is not over until the ball is out. The props should maintain the push forward, or at least scrum keep the scrum stable until the ball is out.

4. Pushers / locks

	Key factors - pushers / locks
1	Bind across the shoulders and onto the waistband.
2	Either squat or kneel on the inside knee and come up into position beneath the buttocks of the props and hooker. It may be necessary to enter at knee height in order to come up into position.
3	Bind with the free arm onto the props between the legs and onto the waistband. This may be tightened by moving the hand across the waistband onto the inner hip or in a bind around the prop's waist onto the waistband.
4	Drive the front row into engagement and maintain the pressure.
5	Retain both body and feet positions upon contact.
6	Apply weight by either sinking at the knees or by straightening the knees.

The role of the pushers / locks

Pre-engagement
While the locks do lock the scrum together, their main task is to push forward. This must be done so that they push the scrum straight down the field. This is maintained by ensuring the feet are parallel to the touchline.

Squatting
In open-grade Rugby the pushers usually squat before contact. This allows the locks to bind onto the props before binding to each other. The position before engagement is awkward but when the scrums do engage there is little need to adjust. The scrum is very stable.

Sometimes, from this position, the pushers can be left behind as the front row moves forward to engage. This greatly reduces the effect of engaging strongly. This problem is solved by ensuring binding is tight. The pushers should drive the front row into engagement. Each prop is driven into position by the combined efforts of the lock and flanker. They form their own mini-unit, the two behind supporting the prop.

On the inside knee
If a problem persists, the pushers should kneel on their inside knee prior to engagement. This will put their outside shoulder ahead of their inside shoulder. Consequently weight will be applied mainly on the prop rather than the hooker. Once contact is made, the foot of the inside leg must be moved forward so that it is in line with the outside foot. This ensures the player has good body position. Weight can be lost when the foot is moved.

Binding to the front row
It has been common practice for the hooker to bind with the loose-head prop tightly at the hips. Sometimes their legs are crossed with the hooker almost sitting on the loose-head prop's knee. If the hooker can keep the hips forward so that the lock's head is far enough forward to ensure the shoulder is tight on the prop, this is fine. But if the lock cannot get the head between the prop and hooker then they should change. Their binding should be loose enough to allow the locks to be comfortable. Relative comfort is essential. This is achieved by all players having both their feet and spine in line.

The crotch grip
The crotch grip is both effective and safe. It ensures that the pusher does not slip up above the prop's buttock, pushing the prop down. It allows the flanker to push onto the prop without pushing on the upper thigh. Finally, no strain is put on the lock's shoulder, which can occur when binding around the waist.

The grip is through the props' legs and onto the waist band so that there is little movement. Props with longer arms may have to bind across to the inside of the waist band to achieve a tight grip.

This does not prevent the lock binding around the prop's waist. Some teams do this very successfully, as they feel it compresses the front row more successfully, creating a compact, narrow and powerful target.

As a safety measure the pusher must not grip on the prop's upper jersey once the scrums engage. When a scrum is pushed, the tendency will be to pull the prop down. This is dangerous, as it can collapse the scrum.

Flankers and the number 8
The flankers and the number 8 are pushers also. They apply their weight in unison with the locks following the same key factors.

The flankers push in the same way as the pushers or locks. They have a second task of pushing in at a slight angle on the prop's hip. This enables the prop to keep square on with the spine parallel to the touchline.

There are three variations of binding:
• Bind on the near lock's torso.
• Bind on the far lock's torso.
• Bind through the prop's crotch.

Flankers should use whatever method is comfortable. The overall criteria must be that the binding must not impede the prop. The flankers bind with their inside foot back.

The number 8 pushes in the same way as the locks, binding to them either around the hips or using the crotch grip.

5. Channellers (flankers and number 8)

Key factors - chanellers	
1	The loose-head flanker positions the feet prior to engagement to ensure minimum movement is necessary to channel the ball to the No.8.
2	The No.8 should channel the ball to the right or tight-head side of the scrum. This may involve a change in the No.8's positioning.
3	Develop delivery options for all circumstances including what to do if/when the scrum is pushed back.

The role of the channellers

It is essential that all players in the scrum push until the ball is out. If they adjust their feet after the scrum has engaged, the weight will be reduced and the scrum may be pushed back, making delivery difficult.

The left or loose-head flanker has the task of channelling the ball once it has been hooked between the legs of the loose head prop by the hooker. To channel the ball the loose-head flanker may have to move the feet. This movement can be minimised by having the feet in the correct position before engagement. This position is to have the outside left foot up and in the normal pushing position. The inside right foot is back and angled to deflect the ball to the number 8. The aim is to channel the ball to the right of the number 8. From this position the scrum half can pass the ball without the risk of being impeded by the defensive scrum half.

The space between the flanker and the number 8 does expose the ball to the defensive scrum half. It may be necessary to reposition the number 8 between the left flanker and left lock. This should only be done if it is not going to reduce the ability of the scrum to push forward or, at least, remain stable.

In some circumstances, mainly for an attacking back row move, the right flanker may position in the number 8's position, between the two locks.

6. The link player

	Key factors - link player
1	Know the preferred attacking option.
2	Be alert to option changes resulting from the actions of the opposition.
3	Co-ordinate the delivery of the ball.
4	Decide on the best option and perform that option.

The role of the link player

The link player is usually the number 9, but can sometimes can be the number 8. However, the number 9's view of how play is developing is much wider than that of the forwards. In addition, the number 10 will be telling number 9 what is to be done.

Normally a move will be decided prior to engagement. The forwards will be told about this in the tactical decision maker's calls. However, other options may develop. Factors that may cause a change are:

• the scrum pushing the opposition scrum back
• the scrum turning, especially to the left. Play should continue if this is less than 90°; this movement will block any moves to the right.
• the defensive blind-side wing's position standing either in line with the hindmost foot or in the back three to field a kick.
• the defensive open-side wing's position and that of the fullback.

Analysis of scrum patterns

Contesting possession

There are few occasions in a match in which a team 'wins a tight head', i.e., they win the ball on their opponents' throw-in. The infrequency with which such a turnover occurs does not mean that it should not be attempted, but it is true to say that defensive scrummaging is more about creating instability in the opponents' scrum than it is about winning possession of the ball.

By preventing the attacking scrum from moving forward or by pushing it back, delivery is slowed down, space is limited and options are reduced.

Even if the ball is cleared, the effectiveness of supporting forwards in ensuing play will be reduced. This is because they will have to delay leaving the scrum, as their weight will be needed to slow down the retreat of their scrum.

Delivery of possession

The pattern of play from the scrum is primarily dictated by the quality of possession obtained from the scrum. This section discusses the various ways the ball may be delivered, and possible outcomes.

The ball may be delivered on the loose-head side of the scrum having been hooked between the loose head prop's feet, and channeled by the loose head flanker to the number 8, who guides the ball to the left hand side of the scrum. A second channel is used when the ball is struck so that it is channeled between the locks to the number 8 bound between them. The ball is once again guided to the same position as in the first channel.

The position from which the ball will be delivered will depend on the option to be used: if the number 8 is to pick up the ball and go forward, the second of the two options will be used while the first will be used if the scrum half is to pass it.

Key factors - delivery	
1	The half back or scrum half usually feeds the scrum. This is done on the loose head, or left, side.
2	The half back should be at the tunnel with the ball before the scrum engages.
3	Timing between the halfback and the hooker is of paramount importance.
4	Generally, the hooker strikes with the right foot, though there are some hookers who strike with the left.
5	There are two main hooking channels: a. Channel one is when the hooker strikes the ball between the loose head prop's legs and the ball exits the scrum between the loose head flanker and lock. Sometimes the number eight has to position between the flanker and the lock to control the ball. b. Channel two is directly back to the number 8 who is bound between the locks.
6	Usually, the number eight brings the ball across to the right, which makes it easier for the halfback to pass the ball without pressure from the opposing halfback.
7	When passing to the right, the half back uses a left-handed pass. When passing to the left, in order to prevent interference from the opposition half back, the half back places his/her body between the ball and the opposing player, so in this case it is also a left-handed pass.
8	The number eight and the half back should have options whereby the number eight can pass, pick, pop or flick the ball back to the half back to avoid pressure.

Delivery when moving back

Delivery of the ball can be difficult if the scrum is moving backwards. There are a number of ways to cope with this. All have one technique in common - to use the opposing scrum's forward movement to roll around the side. This re-establishes the team's forward movement. It is a similar technique to that used when rolling a maul.

All these moves must be practised. They cannot be made up at the time when the scrum unexpectedly starts moving back.

One method is for the number 8 to pick up the ball. The player rolls left back on in to the defensive number 9, using that player to create stability. The right flanker drives into the number 8 and pushes forward. The drive may continue or the ball may be passed to number 9 to be passed or kicked. Less common is the same move to the right. With the right flanker between the locks, this player can pass to the halfback to the right, away from the defensive halfback.

Disruptive tactics - the wheel

While the scrum will naturally wheel in a clockwise direction, and will tend to do so when a strong scrum pushes opponents back, deliberate wheeling is illegal. It is more often the result of pulling back.

As a result, a wheel of up to 90° is the result of pushing and the tactical advantage one seeks is to open up the left to attack, as the opposing loose forwards will have been wheeled out of the way. Teams must not be embarrassed by a wheel but look on it as an opportunity to exploit this advantage. The turn may be to the blind-side or to the open-side - either side offers tactical advantages.

When it is done within the Law, the defensive pattern must adjust to cover the advantage offered to the attack. As a result it is best performed when the opposition is wheeled into a narrow blind-side and it is seldom an advantage when the attack is wheeled to a wide blind or the open-side.

The clockwise wheel occurs when the tight-head side of the scrum locks up and the loose-head pushes through. This can be assisted by the scrum taking a small step to the left and the locks advancing their left foot driving their left shoulder further forward.

To wheel the scrum to the right, the process is reversed. However, if the scrum steps to the right it will be assisting the opposition's power and the ploy will be more likely to be defeated.

The wheel can be countered by crabbing across into the direction of the wheel. This is very difficult to do and takes a lot of practice. An alternative is to bind tight and, as soon as the opposition shift their feet push forward and sustain the push. This can be predicted as the opposition will want to do this to your scrum in the same situations as you want to do it to theirs. By recognising the situation the scrum can move to counter it and, even if the prediction was not correct, nothing is lost.

	Key factors - wheeling the scrum
1	To understand the dynamics of the scrum, you should refer to the axis. The axis of the scrum is the opposition hooker's right shoulder. This is the centre of the scrum around which it rotates.
2	This is the reason why the scrum naturally screws in a clockwise direction.
3	A strong scrum can promote one side of the scrum, which gives them an advantage to attack. If the team wishes to attack to the right and promotes the right-hand side the opposition loose forwards will be taken further away from play. The opposite is true when a team wishes to attack to the left.
4	The option to wheel a scrum or to promote one side must be conveyed to all forwards before setting up, so that they can make adjustments to assist with the wheel.
5	Having a strong engagement and applying constant pressure can greatly assist.
6	To perfect a wheel, one side of the scrum anchors while the other exerts pressure.
7	The easiest way to counter a wheel by the opposition is to apply constant, even pressure on them so that they are kept on their heels in a weak position. This will prevent them from generating enough momentum to wheel.
8	The number 8 and the half back should practise the option of having the number 8 pass, pick, pop or flick the ball back to the half back to avoid pressure.

Another approach to driving the scrum

Rather than regard the sub-units of the scrum as front row, middle row and back row, treat them as two pushing units, the loose-head side including the hooker and loose head prop, lock and flanker, and the tight-head side of the tight-head prop, lock, flanker and number 8.

This method has been successfully used and better identifies the scrum's pushing units. These units can practice against each other without the impact of a full scrum allowing techniques to be shared by team-mates and problems solved.

Conclusion

During a game the collective and individual contests that arise from scrummaging can distract individuals from the collective role of winning possession on the forward move so that the team has the best attacking prospects. These distractions and a lack of collective concentration can reduce attacking options or put undue pressure on your team's defence.

Patterns of play: restarts
3 - Lineout

Aim

To obtain controlled possession of the ball so that the team has the greatest range of options with which to go forward.

Lineout overview

To gain possession the forwards must operate as a combined unit to control the ball. This may be achieved in a number of ways. All of these should have one common aim: that control of the ball enables the team to go forward using the best tactical option. It should not be a tactical option forced on them by the opposition creating uncontrolled possession.

Functional roles

1. Thrower
2. Jumper / catcher
3. Lifter / supporter
4. Decision makers

1. Thrower

	Key factors - thrower
1	Know the call - both the position of the jumper and the type of jump.
2	Throw accurately to the space into which the jumper is moving.
3	Throw using the type of throw wanted by the jumper.
4	Once the throw has been completed, control the space between the lineout and the touchline.

The role of the thrower

The throw itself

The ability of opponents to contest the ball at the lineout can create complex situations in which there are many variables. The throw may be flat and hard, or a lob throw, or something in between. It may be to any position and it may be to the space into which the jumper is moving, meaning that there is no player to target.

Additionally, defenders are contesting the ball in more than one position, supported by team-mates who provide stability while the jumper is in the air.

The catcher is able to move to the line of touch before jumping. Consequently, it is to the space that the catcher is going to that the ball must be thrown.

Most catchers have more than one throw that they use to outmanoeuvre their opponents. The thrower should master, as a minimum, a front throw and a back throw.

The front throw is usually flatter and faster. It is caught by the catcher, who has gained a position in front of the opposing player. The back throw is a lob, which clears any opponent in front of the jumper and is thrown to the space to which the jumper is moving back. Timing is essential to prevent interference.

Opposition creates pressure and it is good practice to have a policy determining the direction in which the thrower may over compensate. It is better to throw too far than to drop short as the players at the end of the line-out will not have jumped and will be able to adjust.

Play after the throw

Once the ball has been thrown in, the thrower positions so as to prevent opponents from moving around the front of the lineout. This may occur if the ball has been tapped back or if the ball has been lost.

This attacking role is performed by the thrower leaving a small space between the thrower and the lineout. The opposing player can attempt to move between the thrower and the lineout, in which case the player can be bound into the lineout maul. Secondly, the defender may be forced to go around the thrower, taking more time in doing so. This delay allows the ball to be recovered.

In an attacking lineout the thrower is being used increasingly to attack through gaps in the lineout as it compresses when the opposition contests the ball.

In a defensive lineout the defensive thrower should position close to the attacking thrower initially. This creates an unimpeded line to run towards tapped ball.

Once the ball has been won, the defensive thrower should hold the position until it is clear what is happening. This is to make sure that the attack doesn't use the narrow blindside, either from the initial attack or from phase play.

Once the ball is clear of the lineout, the player's options are to follow the ball or to defend behind the player's defence line. The choice will depend on the quality of the attack and the role of the player in the defensive screen following phase play. As the player is not bound into the lineout, the more free-ranging role may demand that the need is to get close to the ball to complete the tackle, contest the ball and form close-in defence at the ensuing ruck.

Using the thrower to contest

Options to contest the opposition ball involve the thrower. By including the thrower in the lineout, the team has four players who can assist the two principal jumpers. The Law requires that a player, probably the number 9, positions between the touchline and the 5m line.

2. Jumper / catcher

	Key factors - jumper / catcher
1	Move to create space that can be moved into by out-manoeuvring opponents before the throw is made.
2	Golden rule: the space you create is the space you move away from, not the space you move into. This can equally be applied to lineout play.
3	Move into the space on the throw so that the jump is vertical.
4	Drive up towards the ball by starting low and driving with the arms. However, care must be taken to not exaggerate movement so that the destintation of the throw is made obvious to the opposition.
5	Catch with soft hands so the ball is not tapped in an uncontrolled way
6	Watch the ball into the hands
7	Once the ball has been caught, move the hands immediately away from opponents and turn to face the half back
8	Deflected or tapped ball should be deflected either to a supporting forward who is still in the lineout or directly to the halfback.

The role of the jumper / catcher

The timing of the movements of the catcher is critical as a split second can be the difference between winning and losing the ball.

The catcher creates space by movements on the ground. By the jumper initially moving back, the opponent is drawn back too, thereby creating space in front. By moving forward, space is created behind.

If the jumper is 'looping', movement into the space should be late, so that the opposition's reaction time is minimised.

Once the space has been created, the jumper should move to the space quickly to prevent the opposing catcher from recovering. A further option is for a player to change from a lifter role to that of a jumper, and vice versa.

Most catchers catch the ball on their opponent's side of their body. Others have perfected the technique of jumping with their back towards their opponents. Their body is often so far across in the action of jumping that they are able to catch the ball on their team's side of their body, which is of course preferable.

Once the jumper has left the ground, the stability given by the supporting players allows the catcher to drive up with the hands to gain more height.

Once the ball is caught, it must be moved away from the opponents. The hands move first, and the rest of the body will follow.

Current technique allows the catcher to jump slightly early, especially in the positions at the front of the lineout. By being held in the air at the top of the jump, the catcher can provide the target for the thrower before the ball is thrown in this position.

The jumpers can be decoys for each other by jumping when the ball is not being thrown to the player. The opponents may concentrate their efforts on the dummy jumper, thus resulting in the creation of unopposed catching opportunities.

In defence, both jumpers will force greater accuracy on the opposition's throw if both are supported in the air. One may catch the ball or the thrower may overthrow, missing that jumper. As the opposition are committed to supporting the jumper, this often results in a free catch to defenders at positions 6 and 7.

3. Lifter / supporter

Key factors - lifter	
1	Create space for the catcher as soon as possible.
2	In creating space, turn to face the catcher.
3	Once the catcher commences to leave the ground, assist by pushing the catcher up, holding the player in the air until the catch is made.
4	When the catch has been made, lower the catcher and bind to protect the ball from opponents.

Key factors - supporter	
1	Initially move forward and across towards the jumper and bind to form a protective screen for the ball.
2	Sight the ball throughout.
3	If the ball is not taken cleanly, recover the ball while still holding the line.
4	If the ball is taken cleanly, either keep in line or move to form a maul, depending on the options.

The role of the lifter

Within the Law, the support players occupy space, creating space for the catcher.

Positioning and creating Space
The lifters are doing this by minimising their movements so that they are in position early. Some players at position 1 offer a catching option prior to moving.

In most cases players support at positions 1, 3 and 5 so that in one step they can create space for the catcher and be in position to support.

The supporting players create space by turning and stepping across to face each other. Their body position occupies space and prevents the opposition moving into the space they have created for the catcher. The position 1 support player usually faces the jumper to reduce the number of movements needed to be in position. The position 3 support player is used to support both jumpers. So that the opposition do not know who the throw is going to, this player should initially position in the same way for both of the jumpers, i.e., in a crouch facing the opposition.

Supporting
The support players support the catcher as that player moves up to catch the ball. They do this by gripping on the shorts at the back and stabilising the jumper by pushing up on a position just above the knees at the front. The catcher is stabilised at the top of the jump by the supporting players locking the elbows with the arms held at full stretch.

The lifter starts by driving up, as if from a squat. The power is generated through the legs, body and eventually the arms and hands. They must let the catcher down in a controlled way, whether the ball has been caught or not.

If the support players dominate the space between the lineouts, within the Law, height is unimportant, as the opposition will be unable to contest the ball because they will not be able to move into space.

After the catcher returns to the ground, the supporters and the catcher form the front row of the maul that develops.

The role of the supporter

The first priority of lineout play is to catch the ball. The second is to control the ball so that delivery is measured. To achieve this, the forwards in positions 1 to 6 in the lineout should bind as a single unit, six players long and one player deep. This protective screen allows the ball to be controlled. The players should be closer to the opposition than the ball.

To co-ordinate the timing, all players should move across towards the opposition, compress towards the ball carrier and bind with each other. No players should lose sight of the ball, so those in front of the position where the ball is to be caught should turn inwards, always looking at the ball during its flight.

The exception may be the position 3 player who, in supporting catchers at positions 2 and 4, may support 'blind' so as to make sure the jumper is in position and that the space needed is not taken by the opposition. The same will apply to the front lifter.

If the ball is not taken cleanly, other forwards may recover it. But these players should only do so if they can remain in the lineout.

If they cannot, their role is to provide protection for the scrum half/ half back. It is the scrum half's role to recover the ball.

To do this, the scrum half must position closer to the touchline than the likely position of the ball. This enables the scrum half to move towards the ball while being able to see the backs at the same time. A dive pass can be used to clear the ball under pressure.

5. Decision makers

The decision makers may be any designated player in the lineout. The decisions that are made are to give the lineout the best opportunity for success by changing the format, approach and tactics. Examples of these decisions are:

1. The number of players in the lineout.
2. The position of the jumper.
3. The type of throw.
4. The attacking option and the delivery of the ball.
5. The timing of delivery.

The role of the decision maker

Reducing the numbers in the lineout can create an advantage by:

- opening up the lineout so that the opposing team's illegal tactics are exposed and penalised
- creating a mismatch (the team should add additional players until a mismatch in their favour is achieved)
- spreading the defence so that an attack can be made directly from the lineout.
- using forward runners in the midfield to penetrate and create left and right options from phase play.

Initially, the position of the jumper will be based on where the ball can be won. Secondly, throws that ensure a balanced drive from the middle of the lineout or which tie in opposing forwards at the end of the lineout may be used.

The type of throw is usually called by the jumper although this may be pre-planned in the case of loop jumpers.

Timing and type of delivery are dealt with in previous sections above.

6. Passer

Key factor - passer	
1	Play the ball to ensure that the best attacking option is used.

The role of the passer

The kick option is most often used to clear the ball from a defensive position. One pass to another player may be one pass too many and the rushed kick by the receiver may then gain very little territory.

The player has the protection of the forwards and is often in a better position than the number 10. So long as the ball clears the forwards, it can be a high kick or one that is flatter and eventually rolls along the ground.

To clear the forwards, the kick is best made standing side on to the lineout and angling the foot to direct the ball down the field.

The number 9 must develop a clearance pass from a standing position, as the ball is more often handed back out of the lineout than placed on the ground. Once the player's hands are on the ball it can be deemed to be out and there are no defence lines so the player has to play the ball immediately, whether that be to pass or kick.

Analysis of lineout patterns

Assembly

If a team forms early, they will be in a position to commence the lineout before their opponents, so that winning the ball will be easier.

On the other hand, the team that forms first at the lineout gives their opponents something to react to so that mismatches are created. This is less important if a team has lineout superiority, but very important if the opposing team is competitive.

Identification and use of mismatches

Misatches at the lineout can be created in the following ways:

1. The conventional situation
This occurs when a superior jumper creates a mismatch at numbers 2, 4, and 6. If a team has a player who is superior to an opponent, then quite conceivably, the ball can be won there with great regularity. All that is required is for the jumper, in co-ordination with the support players, to use body language to draw an opponent either back or forward and then move in the opposite direction to catch the ball unimpeded. If this wins the ball, then the lineout need not be any more complicated than that.

However, if guaranteed possession is only available close to the touchline, attacking options are limited because the half back/scrum half's pass may be too short to put the first five-eighth/fly-half beyond the forwards at the tail end of the lineout. To prevent this, a throw may have to be made deeper into the lineout where a simple mismatch advantage may not exist.

2. Using loop jumpers
A more recent practice is to use 'loop' jumpers.

The loop jumper is the player who leaves one position in the lineout and, within Law, re-enters in another position where the jumper creates a mismatch in the player's favour.

The call should have two elements to it. The first is to identify the player who is to be the loop jumper. The second will indicate the position to which that player is moving. In its most fundamental form the call of "5-2" could indicate that the player at number 5 in the lineout is to move to the space at number 2, with the initial number 2 moving back and performing the role of a support player, along with number 1.

Of course a code such as this will be easily deciphered, but the key point is that any code should have these two elements in addition to telling the thrower the type of throw that is required.

When using loop jumpers the following points need to be taken into account.

• When a player moves forward into a space, the player is more likely to gain greater height when jumping. Timing, and the speed with which they move into the space, will make a front throw very difficult for the opposition to contest.

• The same player will have difficulty moving forward into the space and then moving back to leap for a back throw. Less height is likely to be gained.

• When a player moves back into a space, the preferred throw will be one made in the direction in which the player is moving, i.e., a back throw. The most likely mistake in this situation is the thrower "under-throwing" and the ball not reaching the jumper.

• While it may take a great deal of practice, a jumper moving back into a space and then moving forward to be in front of an opponent is a worthwhile option, as is the same player feinting forward and then moving back. It is all a matter of timing between the thrower and the jumper.

3. Other looping players

Players moving to spaces within the lineout need not be jumpers. They can be support players or decoys.

As support players they move to a space in front of or behind the jumper to perform this role. The player they are supporting may have initially have been a jumper or a support player. If this player was initially designated as a support player, and the role changes to jumper, a favourable mismatch is most likely to have been created.

A player moving into a space can be used as a decoy, drawing opponents to the space they are moving into, while the throw is then directed elsewhere.

In some instances, the opponents (and even team-mates) can be so distracted by all the movement elsewhere in the lineout that the ball can be thrown to an unmarked player standing on the ground. This is usually a player who is standing at position 1 or 2 and sometimes it is the player standing at position 6 or 7.

With these variations, lineout ball can be secured even if a team is playing against taller opponents. Timing, precision and decoys can be used to gain possession so long as the players are alert to the actions of their opponents and are able to react to their positioning. It is important to react rather than play by rote. Your coaching methods must pay attention to this ability to react.

Lineout tactics

Delivery options
The delivery of the ball depends on the attacking options. If the ball is delivered before the lineout is over, i.e., before the ball leaves the line of touch, then the space between the backlines, 20 metres or more, gives the attack the space and time to move the ball wide. However, immediate delivery from the catch may not commit the opposing loose forwards and the number available to defend may exceed those available to mount an attack.

A further option is to bring the ball down, hold it on the line of touch and then deliver the ball. This will create hesitation in the defensive loose forwards, as they will be offside if they move beyond the 15-metre line. The spacing between the back lines will be retained. This will prevent the midfield from becoming flooded with defenders.

If the attack is to take place close to the lineout it may be necessary to reduce the defence's time and space. This can be done by driving forward from the line of touch. As a result, the defence will come closer to the hindmost foot.

If the forwards do drive they should deliver the ball while still on the forward move so that the backs receive the ball moving forward and with the opposition defence moving backwards to stay onside. Once the drive clears the line of touch the 10m offside line no longer applies. So in order to retain any advantage, the drive should continue for at least 10m to compensate for this loss.

If the forwards drive without referring to the option called by the attacking backs, the backs will have to change the option as there will be either too much time or, more likely, too little time to perform the previously chosen attacking option.

When the ball is contested, its delivery can be untidy. This applies equally to the attacking and defensive teams. To compensate for untidy ball, the half back should position closer to the touchline than the likely location of the ball. This will enable the deliverer to move towards the ball with both the ball and the first receiver in the same line of vision. While a dive pass, which can be well used in this situation, may take the player out of play, it offers great advantages in clearing the ball from a poor situation into space. In other words, the pass is converting poor possession to good possession, from which atacking play can be built.

Attacking options
The attacking options within the lineout are in response to the behaviour of the defence. If the defence contests the ball in the air, and especially if they use four players to support two jumpers, they leave themselves vulnerable to a number of options. Among these are:
• a direct drive and maul
• a pass to a player standing in or running into space in the lineout caused by the compression of opponents when they contest the ball. This space may be at the front, the back or within the lineout.

The defence might not contest the ball in the air but rather stay on the ground to immediately drive the ball carrier back. In doing so, they are contesting territory and the most frequent use of this is when a try can be scored close to the goal line. However, because possession is conceded, their actions offer options to the team in possession. Among these are:

• a direct feed to exploit space in the back line created by the defensive forwards being slow to leave the lineout because of their commitment to the drive
• moves away from the focus of the defence's drive but still within the lineout
• a peel around the front or the back
• once the ball is caught, smuggling it to team mates away from the focus and maul around the opposition, preferably in-field. As with all mauls, the drive of opponents is used to deflect the pressure by mauling round it, putting opponents behind the ball.

General rule
Assuming that a team has a lineout that wins most of its own ball, the lineout should be based on the attacking option, as the lineout now becomes the first pass-and-run option in the attacking sequence.

Defensive options

By supporting one or two jumpers in the air, the ball is being contested which is what the Game wants. The Game is one in which the contest creates commitment from both teams, and the rewards for the team winning the ball are the possession and space that are created by this commitment.

This demands greater accuracy in the throw and forces the throwing team to use more complex manoeuvres. Because of their complexity more can go wrong, creating the possibility of regaining possession.

While defensive teams may not be able to cover all options, taking positions in the lineout that create predictable options will put them in a position to prepare a more thorough defence.

Apart from getting ahead of their jumper on a flat throw and occupying the space behind on a lob, pressure alone can cause an inaccurate throw. The result usually is an overthrow, enabling the defence to regain the ball at the end of the lineout. The overthrow is more likely than the underthrow to a defending jumper who gets in front, but this does occur too.

A skill in contesting the ball is for the jumper to duplicate the movements of the opponent by watching the jumper's feet, and when the jumper crouches to jump, to do the same. With support, both the space and the ball can be contested.

Contesting the space

In the past, because of the difficulty of defending a maul, teams have been less likely to contest the ball in the air, hoping to stop forward movement from the lineout before a maul has even been formed. This has changed with the introduction of the Experimental Law Variations.

 The defending team can now tackle the players in the maul so long as the tackle is made above the waist. This gives them an effective weapon to contest territory from a maul in any part of the field, but most of all from lineout from which most mauls commence.

Patterns of play: continuity
1 - Attack

Aim

To create a space through which at least one member of the attacking line is able to penetrate the opposition's initial line of defence and break the gain line, allowing the team to go forward in attack.

Attack overview

The initial aim of the attacking line is to adapt play as the attack develops so that the defence is unable to mark all players. This creates pressure on the defence. In deciding which player each defender is to tackle, the defence becomes disorganised. When the ball is passed to the unmarked player, that player is able to penetrate.

If and when this is achieved, the second aim is to get the ball to or beyond the gain line. This is because all players entering the contest at the tackle are at a disadvantage if they have to go back before entering play through the tackle gate.

As a result, the defence has an advantage at the tackle, as the tackle line is on the attacking team's side of the gain line. The defence can move forward while the attack has to move back before coming forward again, if play is stopped before the gain line.

It is a priority for the attacking team to make sure that primary possession is retained. To do so most easily, the tackle line and gain lines must be broken.

In doing so there is a dilemma, as the shortest distance to the gain line is closest to the source of possession. However, this is also where there is the greatest number of defenders. Where there are fewer defenders there are also fewer attackers, and the attack is further from the gain line.

As a result, it is a matter of varying play so that attempts to reach the gain line are effective.

Functional roles

1. Distributor
2. Playmaker
3. Decoy
4. Penetrator
5. Support

1. Distributor

	Key factors - distributor
1	Pass quickly to the playmaker
2	Run straight and commit defenders as much as possible
3	Pass off the inside leg to commit defenders
4	Commit, pass and then support in three distinct movements
5	Take the gap if the defence moves away
6	If passing is going to worsen the situation, go forward, find support to pass to or set up a ruck or maul

The role of the distributor

Distributors have two key tasks. The first is to pass the ball quickly to the playmaker, and the second to commit defenders while passing.

Passing and alignment
In passing the ball the aim is for the playmaker to receive the ball close to but not on the tackle line. This will enable the playmaker to commit the defence while creating and passing to the gap into which the penetrator is running.

The position of the playmaker and the alignment determines how long the distributor can take to pass the ball. The further from the source of possession, the greater the number of passes to be made and, if the attack line is flat, the quicker the passing needs to be. The closer to the source of possession, the fewer the number of passes and the deeper the attacking line, thus the more time can be taken.

This will be assisted by the delivery of the ball from the lineout and scrum. If the ball is delivered quickly from the line of touch there will be 20 metres between the attacking and defensive lines, and therefore time to make more passes to move the ball out wide.

If the lineout becomes a maul and is driven off the line of touch, the offside line will move to the hindmost foot taking away space and the time needed to make many passes.

The key variables that determine attack depth and alignment are:
• The position at which penetration is to be attempted.
• The number of passes to this position.
• The accuracy of passing and hand speed.
• The speed and lines of running.
• Delivery from the lineout or scrum.

Distributors must not use up the time and space the playmaker needs to perform the role by taking too long to pass the ball or by moving too far forward.

Defenders are committed by the attacking backs catching and passing as close to defenders as passing skills allow, and by running straight at them. By doing this, the defenders will be held inside the distributor's inside shoulder. This will prevent them moving across to defend further along the attacking line.

Changing roles
If they do move, the distributor should use the space from which the defence has moved to attempt to penetrate through the defence. If the defence moves on, the distributor should dummy pass and penetrate.

Even in passing, the distributor must remain on line to hold the defence.

Supporting
In passing, the distributor must commit, pass and then support. Players who pass and support in the same movement allow the defence to drift across. They use the space of the other players across the field and slow down the forward movement of the attacking line. Other players will have to either slow down, run across or do both to catch the ball in front of them. If this doesn't happen passes will be made into the body, not in front of the receiver thus delaying each pass.

Plan B
When things do go wrong because of a lack of accuracy, passing the ball on may only worsen the problem. The player may be better advised to go forward, attempting to evade opponents, i.e., use plan B.

So that support can be used, the player must avoid isolation. Eventually a ruck or maul may be formed and the opportunity created to start again.

2. Playmaker

	Key factors - playmaker
1	Catch the ball early by veering towards the passer when receiving the ball and catching it by moving the hands towards the ball
2	Receive the ball just before the tackle line
3	Commit the defence and pass to the space in front of the penetrating player, or
4	If the designated defender moves to tackle another player, probably the threatening penetrator, the playmaker's decoy run enables the ball carrier to penetrate by taking the gap that has been left

The role of the playmaker

The playmaker is the player who creates the gap and then passes into the gap into which the penetrator is running.

Creating a gap
The gap is created by running towards the designated defender, to hold the player inside the gap. Should the defender move across, the playmaker should take the space ahead and penetrate.

When the defender is held, the playmaker's line of running will increase the size of the gap.

The playmaker should pass the ball into the gap. A floated pass gives the penetrator time to run into the gap, so they can arrive late. Such a delay often causes hesitancy in the defence.

A flat pass reduces the margin of error and more precise timing is needed. Flat passes may cause the penetrator to stand in the attacking line rather than enter it. This will reduce the player's ability to penetrate, as the defence are more likely to be able to see what is happening and then react to it.

3. Decoy

	Key factors - decoy
1	Hold positioning in the attacking line to prevent the designated defender moving to tackle the ball carrier
2	Run on angles to encourage defenders to move away from the ball carrier or from the space created for the penetrator
3	If the defender does not move with the decoy, call for the ball to take advantage of the space ahead
4	Adjust alignment to ensure that you are a receiving option

The role of the decoy

The movement of any player in attack attracts the attention of the defence. In an attacking line each player has a role in keeping the defence away from the gap that the penetrator wants to enter.

Creating a gap
The playmaker increases the size of the gap by straightening or even moving in. The player outside the gap is the decoy. The decoy initially retains normal spacing but then moves wider, taking the defender wide and increasing the size of the gap.

Other decoys may be cutting back against the trend to increase the space available outside or running wide to take the opposition wide and increase the space available inside. These players will be decoys only if they offer a passing option. Consequently, they must be behind the passer to offer this option.

In the basic attacking line move of an extra player entering the attacking line between two front line players, the key decoy is the next player in the attacking line.

If the defender moves with the decoy, a gap will be created for the penetrator.

If the defender moves in to tackle the penetrator, then the ball should be passed to the decoy. As the decoy is unmarked, this player can now become the penetrator.

The decoy should position slightly deeper than usual so that the movement of the defenders can be more easily seen. In a 3–on–2, the miss pass that is made to the decoy is called by the decoy as this player has a better view of the play.

4. Penetrator

	Key factors - penetrator
1	Stand inside or outside the gap
2	Enter the gap as late as possible
3	Receive the ball as far from the most obvious tackler as possible
4	Once the pass has been caught, accelerate through the gap
5	If a try cannot be scored, link with supporting players furthest from the defenders
6	If tackled before passing, retain possession to allow support to set up phase play

The role of the penetrator

Positioning

The initial positioning of the penetrator is important for the success of the move. Few defenders are going to be beaten by a penetrator who stands in line with the gap to be run into. Consequently, the penetrator should stand inside or outside the gap.

By standing inside the gap, the penetrator can help to hold the defence so that they cannot rush across to defend. This is done by running as a decoy towards, but not into, each of the gaps between players before selecting the intended gap. This may reduce the speed of entry into the gap into which penetration will be attempted.

Entering the gap

In entering the gap from the inside position the penetrator should enter the gap as far from the most likely tackler as possible. This is likely to be the decoy's defender. With the playmaker moving in and holding the defence inside and the decoy taking the defender wide, the pass should be close to the playmaker.

The playmaker can assist by continuing to run in a supporting role down the field after the pass has been made.

In entering the gap from the outside, the penetrator initially is running towards the defence. This holds the defence but the player must be able to veer out into the space that has been created on the outside. If the player has this ability, this is less orthodox and often more successful.

A floated pass allows the penetrator to hold position before catching the pass, reducing the reaction time of the defence.

Using support

Once the ball has been caught, the penetrator must accelerate to prevent the defence from recovering. At the same time the player must be conscious of the options available to score, to pass, to support or to take the tackle and set up phase play.
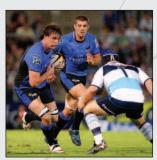
5. Support

	Key factors - support
1	Retain depth from the ball carrier so there is time to adjust to the player's actions and movements
2	Balance the support to ensure that left and right options are available to the ball carrier
3	Retain spacing to prevent all defenders from moving to tackle the ball carrier
4	Let the ball carrier know positioning

Patterns of play: continuity
2 - Support play

Aim

Attack:
To be in a position that gives the ball carrier options to enable play to continue.

Defence:
To assist the first defender to prevent forward movement by the attack, to contest the ball and regain possession.

Support play in attack

Direct support
There is an important difference between direct and indirect support. Players in direct support of the ball carrier are those who are giving the ball carrier passing options or, if the ball carrier goes into contact, are able to link with the ball carrier to ensure possession is retained.

Indirect support
Players who are indirectly in support of the ball carrier are those whose position prevents the defence from moving to tackle the ball carrier.

An example is the blind-side wing when the team attacks on the open-side. Initially, the defensive blind-side wing has to stay in a position to oppose the attacking wing. in case play goes in that direction. Even when play moves to the open side, the blind-side threat may still exist if play is switched to the blind side from general play or a ruck or maul. By staying in position, the attacking wing prevents the defensive wing from moving in support.

The same applies to the backs on the open side when the play takes place down the blind side. If these players move towards the blind side, the defence will be able to move too. A situation in which an extra attacker becomes available leading to a try being scored may be avoided because the attacking players have moved allowing the defence to move to this side of the field.

Functional roles - Support play

Attack
1. Ball carrier
2. Direct support
3. Indirect support

Defence
4. Support play in defence

1. Ball carrier

	Key factors - ball carrier
1	Create space for team-mates by drawing opponents away
2	Off-load the ball just prior to contact to commit defenders
3	Pass the ball into the space that has been created
4	Commit, pass and support in three distinct movements

The role of the ball carrier

The ball carrier's primary role is to carry the ball at speed down the field, evading opponents to score a try. Of course, most initial ball carriers do not complete this process alone. This is because while only one player carries the ball, each member of the defensive team is able to tackle that player within the Laws of the Game.

Consequently, the odds are greatly against an initial ball carrier scoring. A key role then is for the ball carrier to carry the ball at speed down the field while being ready to pass the ball to a team-mate in a better position to continue play.

To achieve this, the ball carrier must be aware of the positioning of supporting players. This will involve the player having good peripheral vision and being aware of the players close by.

While the player should be aiming to evade opponents, the running lines can assist the support players in becoming involved in the game based on the principle that the space that is created is the space the ball carrier moves away from, not the space the ball carrier is moving into.

When a player is running with the ball, the defence is drawn to the player to make a tackle and recover the ball. These players are drawn away from other spaces to those nearer the ball carrier. If the ball carrier is moving to the right, the defence is drawn to the right, creating space to the left. Space will be created on the right if the player moves to the left.

If a player is running straight, space is created on both sides. This is fine, so long as support is available on the left and / or the right, as the defender straight ahead can be held in position and a pass made to an undefended player left or right.

But if a defensive line is being attacked and both the ball carrier and the players on both sides are marked, then something more is required - evasion. By attempting to evade the defence the ball carrier will change the line of running. To be successful the side-step or swerve has to be made close to the defender, reducing reaction time and increasing the likelihood of penetrating. A player with good evasion skills creates uncertainty and hesitation in the defence and more time and space are gained to attack. Therefore all players should develop evasion skills. Evasion is best performed at pace. A slow or stationary ball carrier will find that all evasion does is slow the player down, making the tackle easier.

If the player does not penetrate, at the very least the defender will be drawn to one side creating space from where they have moved. A pass can be made into this space to a support player.

The ball carrier must be skilled at passing into the space. To make a pass into space away from the direction of running is difficult and needs practice.

To make the pass as they are beating a defender, the player should square up the hips such that the tackle, if they are unsuccessful at penetrating, will turn them towards the space they want to pass into.

Because the pass may be difficult, players find it easier to pass in the direction they are running. This allows the defence to continue to move in the same direction and tackle the player receiving a pass. In addition, by moving sideways and then passing in the same direction, the ball carrier is reducing the space the receiver has to continue the attack.

To summarise, the ball carrier creates the space for the support to run into by changing the line of running. Either before or in contact the ball carrier must be able to pass into that space.

2. Direct support

Key factors - direct support	
1	Support in depth
2	Support both left and right
3	Communicate positioning and tell the ball carrier where the space is
4	Be in a position to move forward to the ball as it becomes available

The role of the direct support player

Once the ball has been won support play is the role of all players except the ball carrier.

Tactically, the initial receiver from the source of possession may wish to receive the ball flat, to reduce the defence's space and time to react. This player can only challenge the defence significantly by standing deep and receiving a flat pass, running at pace but with enough stability to evade the tackler. It is this last key point that applies equally to the support player, i.e., the player positions in depth and accelerates to the ball in space. This gives sufficient time to adjust to the line of running of the ball carrier and the option chosen by the ball carrier to transfer the ball to the support player.

Lateral and linear support
Support may be linear, i.e., in depth behind the ball carrier or lateral, i.e., spread across the field.

There should be lateral support if there are more attackers than defenders, as an overlap will exist. An unmarked attacker will emerge, when each player commits a defender before passing to the next receiver running in deep support. It is this player who penetrates, with support adjusting to the new ball carrier to continue the movement.

If the number of defenders exceeds the number of attackers then there is little point in passing the ball along the attacking line of support players as the defence will drift with the ball and 'gang' tackle an isolated player with few, if any, support players to assist.

When the defending line is spread across the field, it lacks depth. The strategy is to attack a point in the line with greater numbers than exist in the defence down that channel. One ball carrier will not penetrate but sound transfer skills to successive support players attacking the same channel in the space created by the running lines of the ball carrier will. Ideallly this attempt at penetration should be mounted where the ball carrier has an advantage over the defender. This may be in size, speed, evasion skills, and/or power. These are the trigger for an attempted penetration.

Ball transfer options
The method that is used to transfer the ball will vary. It will depend on how many defenders have moved in to defend the channel. From many defenders to few, the progression goes something like this:

- The ball carrier in the tackle places the ball, support drives past to create space and the next player picks the ball up and goes forward or passes to a player who is in a better position to go forward.
- The ball carrier in the tackle places the ball and the next player picks it up and goes on.
- The ball carrier turns on impact and makes a screen pass to the next support player.
- The ball carrier goes to ground and, from a stable position lying on the ground, the ball carrier makes a chest pass to the support player.
- As the tackle is made from the side the ball carrier puts the arms through the tackle, turns with the impact of the tackle and passes the ball back into the space the ball carrier has moved from.

The passes made to linear support are more back than across. Consequently they are difficult to defend as defenders generally move back with the line of the ball.

Depth
If the support player is too flat the player is too easily taken out of play. This is because the distance between the ball carrier and the support player is insufficient to allow the support player to adjust to a change of speed or direction by the ball carrier.

This particularly occurs when the ball carrier is immediately stopped by the tackler. Support players will not stop immediately and will move ahead of the ball carrier putting them in an offside position and out of play.

To enable the ball carrier to use the support, these players should be telling the ball carrier which side they are on, the width and depthof their support running as well as where the ball carrier should be running. Within limits, the supporting players cannot be too deep. If a player is further away, the ball carrier need only float the ball in the air to give the support player time to move to and catch the ball.

If a ball carrier is flat, the pass will have to be made quickly, it will be flat and fast. There will be little margin of error and the flow of play may slow as the receiver hesitates to catch the ball.

Increasingly, against defence patterns from rucks in particular, the best support comes from directly behind the ball carrier. When the ball carrier changes the line of running, the support player runs into the space directly ahead, into which a transfer should be made.

A further advantage of being in depth is that the players will be able to move immediately into play should there be a turnover. As defenders, they will be able to immediately reduce any opportunity the opposition has to gain an advantage.

Supporting a penetrating player

When a player penetrates, a disciplined defence will move towards the ball carrier. The closest will make the tackle, and the others will position between the ball carrier and lateral support cutting off pass options.

Lateral players entering the ball carrier's channel on the side of their initial positioning will take the defender with them. An alternative is for an outside support player to take an inside line and an inside support player to take the outside line. In doing so, they increase the number of players on this side challenging the defence. The best option, because it is furthest from the greatest mass of players around the source of possession, is for the ball carrier to attack the defender's inside shoulder, opening up the outside gap for the inside support player to run into. For example, number 12 attacks the defender's inside shoulder creating outside space for number 10 to run into and receive the ball.

3. Indirect support

Key factors - indirect support	
1	Act as a decoy by either maintaining positioning or moving away from the ball carrier

The role of the indirect support player

Players, especially backs, by holding their position, prevent the defence moving towards the ball carrier. This occurs when blindside wings retain their position when play goes to the open side and the open-side backline when play goes to the blind side.

In general play, the role of the decoy helps the ball carrier to make progress. By support players being available and being on both sides of the ball carrier they will cause hesitation by the defence preventing them from all moving to make the tackle.

Support play where contact is made

If a player is unable to use a passing option, they may make contact through a ruck or maul, in order to create offside lines. Immediate support players may then bind and attempt to drive forward. In the case of a ruck, the player(s) may then simply protect the ball or pick and go forward. In the maul, the player at the back of the maul may break off and continue forward momentum.

The convention of lateral play may not convince the defence that they need to come in. The attack must not be bound by convention and should continue the linear pattern until play is stopped. The defence may take some convincing, however, that when they do move in, lateral space will become available. It is then that the ball must be passed to the players in lateral space along the attacking line.

Conclusion

The key strategy in all support is to read the situation, to recognise where the space has been created, and to probe the space to cause a continual adjustment in the defence. With each attack ,the pressure on the opposition increases, creating an increased opportunity to finish things off and score. To the retention of possession and playing to space must be added pace, as, if the speed of the attack slows, or if the attack becomes stationary, the opposition will be able to re-establish their defensive pattern.

4. Support play in defence

Key factors - support play in defence	
1	Assist in completing tasks that will result in possession being regained, e.g., completing the tackle, grabbing the ball, picking up the ball, etc

The role of the defensive support player

Once a defensive player's initial role has been completed the player should move to assist elsewhere. The initial role for most players is to make sure the player that they are marking is tackled or passes / kicks the ball before they are tackled.

The supporting actions that follow must complement those of the players already at the breakdown. A progression of options is:
• Complete the tackle or smother the standing ball carrier so that the ball cannot be released.
• Step over the tackled player and tackler and attempt to recover the ball. Players on the ground may prevent the player straddling. Even though having both feet on the same side of the ball is less stable it is worth contesting the ball because at the very least the delivery of the ball to the attack will be delayed giving the defensive line time to form.
• If the ball cannot be contested on the ground:
  - Accept the impact when being driven off and join the defence line around the ruck / post tackle
  - Drive the opposition back by binding with team-mates and driving through the line of the ball to delay its delivery to the opposition and, maybe, to regain possession.

Increasingly, play surrounding the tackle is being regarded as an opportunity for the defence to regain possession of the ball. The Laws prevent a defender from entering play from the opposing team's side of the ball. This has given rise to tacklers completing the tackle and then immediately getting to their feet and claiming the ball. In being part of the tackle they do not infringe when they re-enter play.

As a result, the tackle and the recovery of the ball by the tackler, after regaining their feet, should be coached as one inclusive skill. Secondly, the player should complement the defensive pattern giving the pattern more depth.

The patterns that are used do vary. Here are some examples:
• The players cover behind the front line of defence to occupy the space between this line and the back three. Here they will be in position to tackle a penetrator or recover a kick made into this space.
• The players move towards the ball crowding the ball carrier so that they can be of immediate support once there is any hesitation.
• The players move forward towards the ball but remain inside the line of the ball, i.e., they shuffle across, keeping in the initial line of defence. This enables them to defend any attacker cutting back against the movement of play and defend the inside channel that the ball carrier may try to pass into.
They may retain this position when there is a breakdown, in order to defend when the attack is reversed back towards them. Secondly, they may retain the position for 2-3 passes and then cut back to defend in depth.

Care must be taken to prevent a mismatch resulting when they retain this position and play is reversed. Slower players must creep closer to the breakdown while faster players must shuffle out to defend players similar in ability and speed to themselves.

Patterns of play: continuity
3 - Phase play

Aim

To maintain continuity of play by recreating the time and space needed to mount an attack.

Phase play overview

The initial modes of attack are, firstly, through the attack line, and secondly, by using support play.

When the defence has prevented the attack from continuing play using these options, it will be necessary to set up phase play. Phase play (rucks and mauls) enable the attacking team to re-establish the space needed to attack.

At the formation of a ruck or maul, the Laws of the Game re-establish the offside line (defence line) which is a line in line with the hindmost foot of the defensive team's ruck or maul, extending across the field.

The space this creates between the defensive and attacking backs gives the attacking backs space and time to continue the attack.

In addition, space is created across the field. This is because rucks and mauls are dynamic formations in which players in a bound mass can move the ball towards the opposing team's goal-line. To contest this forward drive, the defensive team must commit a number of players to the ruck or maul. By their commitment to a relatively small channel down the field, more space is created across the field through which to attack.

If the defence remains spread following the ruck, play directly forward using pick up and go, or form a maul to continue down the field even as far as the goal-line. The function of phase play is to create lateral space but if the defence does not converge on the ball carrier, then there is no reason not to take the path straight ahead.

Functional roles

1. Ball retainer
2. Ball securer / link player
3. Block
4. Binder / driver
5. Forward decision maker
6. Back decision maker

1. Ball retainer

Key factors - ball retainer - at the ruck	
1	Stand in the tackle or
2	Drive forward as far as possible
3	Fall to ensure the ball is available to team-mates
4	Move away

Key factors - ball retainer - at the maul	
1	Stand in the tackle
2	Outside shoulder forward
3	In a crouch with feet shoulder-width apart
4	Control the tackler
5	Present the ball
6	Bind on the support

The role of the ball retainer

When going into contact, the ball should be held in the arm that is not going to make contact with the opposition. The player should target the opponent's side between the shoulder and the hips so that, upon impact, this player is pushed away.

The player should aim to maintain leg speed through the tackle and not just accept contact. The contest is won if:
• the tackle is broken
• the player is able to off-load
• quick ruck ball is recycled as the team goes forward.

The contest is lost if:
• the player is caught high
• the ball is trapped
• ruck ball is slow from a stationary platform, causing over-commitment.

Rucks

Ideally, the ball retainer should not go to ground in the tackle because it is very difficult to recover the ball when it is on the ground. If this is unavoidable, the player should drive forward as far as possible before falling to the ground.

This enables team-mates to move forward and support. The distance that the forwards have to run to support is also reduced. While this ensures possession, it does make continuity more difficult as the player may become isolated.

As the player goes to ground, the ball should be placed for team-mates. Its position can be protected by falling on the opposition's side of the ball and being at right angles to the touchline before moving away. The player may give support more time by falling forward and moving the ball under the body until it emerges between the legs.

The ball is best placed at arms length back from the tackle so that it is furthest from opponents but still under control.

Standing 'in the tackle'

If the ball retainer is able to stand in the tackle. the stance should be stable with feet shoulder width apart sinking at the hips and bending at the knees.

The player's outside shoulder should be forward so that the support players can move to the position of the ball. This position limits the opportunity for an opponent to contest possession. The player may hold the opponent to prevent the ball being contested.

By holding the ball on the lower chest, the player allows the next player to drive in above the ball. This enables the ball to be recovered by driving down on it and claiming it with the hands.

The ball retainer should bind onto the link player so that they form a stable maul along with the defender preventing the ball carrier from being tackled.

Together, they can drive forward while the ball is transferred to the link player away from the opposition.

2. Ball securer / link player

	Key factors - ball securer / link player at the ruck
1	Straddle the tackle
2	If there is time, pick up the ball; if not, bind with team-mates to form a 'front row' over the ball

The role of the ball securer / link player at the ruck

The link player is the first player to support the ball retainer. If there is sufficient time the player should pick up the ball so that it can be moved further forward. This is important if the momentum of play is to be maintained.

However, there may not be time to pick up the ball. Under these circumstances, the player should bind with team-mates and drive through and past the ball so that it is available to the halfback or to allow another player to pick it up to continue the movement. By driving past the ball, the player should drive into opponents to create space for those coming behind. If the link player just drives past the ball it will be left for opponents to pick up.

It is the speed with which the ball is delivered from the ruck that gives the attacking team an advantage. If it is delivered slowly, the defence has time to regroup. Care must be taken not to go to the ground immediately as the ball will be contested, delivery delayed and opportunities lost.

As the ball is on the ground in the ruck, its position is fixed. The Law prohibits players from picking it up and it is risky to push it forward with the feet.

If the ruck becomes stationary the players should have an option that recreates the forward momentum. Among the options are to use a close-in forward as a runner to take the ball forward. When this is done the support must be able to be at the ball very quickly.

When commitment to the ruck is limited, players may drive past the ball so quickly that there is no-one to pick it up or pass it, so the ball will be picked up by opponents. In this situation, no matter how few players are available, a player must play the role of the number 8 at the scrum and trap the ball so that it doesn't leave the ruck by going beyond the hindmost foot.

Slow possession restart options

- Position a strong runner behind the first receiver who stands deep enough to run onto the ball and threaten the defence. Because of the threat, the defence is held by the first receiver, enabling the player to attack the space to the left or right. This will draw the defence away from the space and the ball carrier will be able to pass into the space into which the runner will be running. The runner should catch the ball running at maximum pace so that contact with the opposition does not prevent the player going forward.
- Create space by running across the field and passing back into the space that has been vacated in order for a player to catch the ball and go forward down a channel. Support players follow the ball carrier to continue play if the runner is stopped.
- Number 9 draws the defence away from the ruck or maul and passes to a runner running into the space the number 9 has left.
- Form a group of players passing distance away and on the tackle line. The ball is passed to one of them and they form a maul, exploiting the maul Law that prevents the ball carrier being tackled as they go forward.

	Key factors - ball securer / link player at the maul
1	Drive and bind onto the ball carrier
2	Drive in with the opposite shoulder to the ball carrier to protect the ball
3	Drive on
4	Transfer the ball from the line of contact

The role of the ball securer / link player at the maul

When the link player moves to support the ball retainer, the player must be prepared to go to meet the ball retainer in order to retain possession. By doing this, the transfer of the ball from one player to the next cannot be interfered with. The player should not expect a pass, as by standing passing distance away, the player will be too far away to give the immediate support that is needed.

The ball retainer will have the outside shoulder forward with the link player having the inside shoulder forward sealing off the ball. The ball is transferred by having one foot under the ball so that the player is stable on the ball. Both hands should be under the ball to ensure a low body position.

Once the two players are bound as a unit, and the ball transferred to the link player, this player must decide whether to form a ruck or a maul. This will depend on field position and the positioning of team-mates, as well as team patterns.

If a maul is to be formed the link player should drive forward and make sure the ball is away from contact. The ball should be placed on the player's hip so that it is now two body lengths from the opposition and immediately available for the attacking line should the opportunity arise. So that all options are available, the link player binds but is not bound in by other players.

If a ruck is to be formed, an option is for the link player to drive forward bound to the ball retainer. As support arrives, the link player slides down and places the ball so that it can be cleared.

Decision making at the tackle contest
Once the ball carrier makes contact, the link player has to react to the situation to best effect. The following sequence will result in this player achieving this result.

• If the ball carrier stays standing and drives:
  - If the ball is visible, attack the ball and drive forward.
  - If the ball is hidden, drive the player forward.
• If the ball carrier goes to ground:
  - If the ball is visible, drive the opposing players away from the ball. This is best done by driving directly down the line of the ball so that the head is inside the opposing players. In this position, the shoulders can be used to drive opponents back and to the side, clearing space down the centre channel.
  - If the ball is hidden, straddle the area around the tackle.
  - In both these situations, the next player at the post tackle is essential to either control the ball or form a ruck over the ball that cannot be driven off.

3. Block

	Key factors - block
1	Bind on each side of the link player to protect the ball and to provide a stable platform for a forward drive
2	Control the delivery of the ball
3	Maintain the drive until the ball has been cleared

The role of the block

Maul

If the link player has been unsuccessful in securing the ball from the ball carrier, the priority is to go and help to achieve this. This may mean driving the opposition back or ripping the ball free. The impact of the drive may free up the situation so that the ball can be secured.

If the ball has been secured by the link player, the block's role is to 'seal-off' possession by driving into a position one on the left, the other on the right of the position of the ball. They should be bound and drive beyond the line of the ball to protect it. Their body position should be with the outside shoulder forward, inside leg up, head over the knee and bound onto the initial ball carrier. The inside hand should be bound to the top of the shorts and the outside hand to the bottom. The ball carrier should have slipped the ball to the link player away from the line of contact with the opposition and should stay in position so that the front row is three players wide, protecting the ball. The position of both is aimed to form a wedge.

Post-tackle / ruck

The role given to the next players at the post tackle / ruck may be to block and drive past the ball. However, this will depend on what the tackled player and the link player have done. Among the options are:

1. Follow the link player who has driven an opponent back and to the side and, if there are other opponents near the ball, to do the same to them.
2. If the ball is available, control it by performing the scrum role of the number 8 so that the ball does not leave the ruck to a place where, in the absence of an offside line to stay behind, it can be contested by opponents. Unlike the number 8, the player will probably have to be much lower so that they get under the opposing player, pushing them back.
3. If the drive of the link player has created space ahead, the player may pick up the ball and go forward, or give it to a third player to go forward.
4. If the opposition is driving past the ball, the block should bind with team mates and drive them back.

To achieve these tasks the player will have the most effective body position if they enter play parallel to the touchline in a low body position, with head up and back straight, and arms ready to bind, pick-up the ball or grab opponents to drive them back.

To retain stability, the player should enter play like a plane taking-off, not like one landing. They must avoid coming in at an angle, as an opponent pushing straight will push them away, enabling the opponent to contest the ball. Entering phase play from the side is prohibited by Law.

If the initial three players at the stoppage (maul, ruck or post-tackle) do not perform their roles correctly, there is little that those following can do to prevent a turnover, penalty or a stoppage to which the opposition will get the throw-in.

For this reason, the skills are no longer position specific and are not the sole responsibility of the loose forwards. The practice is for the nearest players to perform the roles involved with the remaining players adjusting to the situation. This has resulted in an increased range of skills being required by all players. This is not just the skills surrounding the stoppage, but the skills of an attacking line to make best use of the ball should it be retained and the skills of the defensive line, should there be a turnover.

4. Binder / driver

	Key factors - binder / driver
1	Arrive in a crouched position
2	Decide whether to assist in recovering the ball or to join the attacking / defensive line
3	Perform the best role to maintain continuity of play

The role of these players is determined by a series of options based on what has already taken place. If there is no threat to retaining possession the options available are:

Maul
• Add to the drive and adapt to the movement of the maul if it goes straight ahead or rolls to one side or slows and the ball needs to be delivered.

Post-tackle / ruck

1. If there is no defence ahead, pick-up and go forward.
2. If the ball is tied up, drive through the line of the ball, binding with team-mates.
3. If there are bodies around the ball, delaying its delivery by rucking them away is often not acceptable. While the referee should ensure that this doesn't happen, it may be necessary to lift or drag them away from the ball.
4. Pass the ball to a support player or, performing the number 9 role, pass it to the attacking line.
5. Leave the initial roles to those ahead and join the attacking line.

If there is a threat, the players should target the area of the ball and drive the opposing player away, binding with team-mates to be more effective. The ball should be delivered when opponents have been committed but also when the formation is moving forward.

Note: When forwards join the attacking line they can create hesitation and insecurity in the backs because the situation may be unfamiliar. To avoid this, forwards can form a second wave behind the backs, either laterally or in linear formation. In this way, they can enter play running off and supporting the backs from depth.

An alternative is to form one extended line that moves forward together, drawing the defence forward. At a mismatch, an attacking player will attempt to penetrate and those nearest in the line must support down the channel of the ball carrier's running line by getting in behind the ball carrier.

5. Forward decision maker

	Key factors - forward decision maker
1	Maintain the drive
2	Organise the transfer of the ball and the attacking options
3	Deliver on demand

The role of the forward decision maker

When playing phase play there is a need for players to communicate with each other. However, play must be determined by one player, so that all efforts are co-ordinated. This may be determined by the team's pattern of play.

As a checklist for what should be done, it is important that the initial drive is maintained. Possession on the front foot offers attacking options, while stationary possession and especially possession going backwards offer few attacking options.

The most important instruction is when to deliver the ball. It must be delivered so that the advantage of opposing players being grouped together at rucks and mauls is exploited.

6. Back decision maker

	Key factors - back decision maker
1	Determine time of delivery
2	Organise the formation
3	Decide on whether to go left or right
4	Decide whether to go wide or to play into space between defenders

The first or second receiver is in the best position to decide what to do with ball passed along the attacking line, as they have more time, space and vision than other players. The decision should be made based on the space that is available. Other players in the attacking line should let the decision-maker know what space is available.

If there is little space because the number of defenders is greater than the number of attackers, the options are:

• To kick to touch so long as the territory gained more than compensates for conceding the throw-in at the lineout.

• To kick over the defensive line so that possession can be contested and regained. This kick, especially if possession is regained, will make the defence aware that they have to defend down the field as well as across it. This will cause them to hesitate in moving forward giving the attacking line more time and space to attack.

• To attack the space between defenders and give possession to support players to play down the channel.

• To attack the space and give it to a runner to take the ball forward to set up another phase play over the gain line so that the defence has to move back to remain on-side. This space can then be used to continue the attack.

Unless the priority is to achieve field position further down the field, if the attackers outnumber the defence, the overlap should be used. The defence will be forced to identify who they will defend and the skill of the attack is to pass the ball to an unmarked player. The success of this will depend on:

• Each player committing a defender.
• Space being recreated for the next receiver by pulling the pass back.
• The next receiver maintaining depth.
• There being no cut-out passes so that defenders are kept 'honest' and cannot drift out to assist elsewhere, thereby eliminating the numerical advantage of the attack.

The players committed to the phase play must be alert to their instructions. This may be a call for the ball to be delivered. Equally it could be a call for greater forward effort and to use forward-based options.

This occurs when the opposition forwards have not committed. In these circumstances, the drive should continue. Another option is for the ball to be delivered and to use forwards who are not committed as runners to continue the attack. The formation in this situation is often called a 'mini' ruck or maul. The formation, ball delivery and the use of runners need to be practised.

Secondly a forward option may be used if the formation has become stationary. The option of using a rolling maul or a runner can be used to re-establish forward momentum before the ball is delivered.

Patterns of play: defence

Aim

To prevent the opposing team gaining territory and to regain possession of the ball.

Defence overview

The first step in any defence is to contest the ball at the source of possession - at scrums, lineouts and kick starts. While possession may not be gained, the opposition will receive poor quality ball, reducing their attacking options. This will result in the defenders having a greater chance of success.

The next step is to prevent territory being gained while ultimately aiming to regain possession of the ball.

Functional roles - Defence

The front line
1. The designated tackler
2. Inside support
3. Outside support
4. The ball recoverer

The back three
1. The ball recoverer / catcher
2. Support players

The front line defends running and passing options and the back three, the kick option. As play develops, the back three must be alert as they will eventually have to join the front line.

Some players will defend the space between the two lines from set pieces. This is usually the number 9 and one or two of the loose forwards. This has become necessary because increasingly kicks are being made into this area.

The front line

1. Designated tackler

	Key factors - designated tackler
1	Play to a pattern
2	Align on the inside shoulder of the designated ball-carrier
3	Align slightly back from the defender inside
4	Retain alignment when moving forward.
5	Tackle to prevent the ball carrier going forward
6	Create an opportunity to regain possession

The role of the designated tackler

Pattern and positioning
From scrums and lineouts, the pattern is usually one out, using the number 7 to allow the backs to move one out from lineout and the positioning of the number 9 to allow this to happen from the scrum. If the ball is passed early, players may be able to drift onto the next player.

By being on the inside shoulder, the outside break is the only available option for the ball carrier. Faster players may be able to stand further infield, further limiting the opportunity to cut back inside.

Peripheral vision of what is happening closer to the source of possession is obtained by each defender being slightly back from the team-mate immediately on the inside. It is important to retain this alignment when moving forward, so that the player can adjust to what is happening. A defender who gets ahead of the player inside leaves a gap for the attack to penetrate.

When the defensive line moves forward they should initially move directly forward as fast as possible to reduce the attack's time and space. However, if they continue on this line, they will be easily beaten. When they are nearer to the attack they should slow down so that they can adjust to the attack and change their line of running so that they can make a strong inside out tackle. By slowing down and forcing the ball carrier to commit, they can accelerate into the tackle.

Tackling

Defending inside out encourages a side-on tackle to be made, and by tackling the player to the ground, the ball becomes contestable. To contest this ball the tackler should develop the complete skill of tackling, getting back on the feet and contesting the ball. The other alternative is for the defender immediately inside, who is defending the inside channel, to move in and contest the tackled ball either during or after the tackle has been completed.

By contesting the ball in or after the tackle, this second tackler has an advantage at the conclusion of the tackle, if they are able to do so from a standing position.

A smother tackle may also lead to a turnover. Whether this is done or not will depend on the relative size of the tackler and the ball carrier, and the amount of space around the tackler. To make a smother tackle, the tackler has to shuffle sideways in order to be in a more direct line with the ball carrier, so that strong contact can be made to the upper body. If the tackler is bigger than the ball carrier and there is little space to left or to right, then this is a good option. However, if the mismatch is in the ball-carrier's favour, this player's leg drive on contact can prevent the ball from being contestable; if there is space around the tackler an elusive player will easily beat a defender who is directly ahead.

Closer to the source of possession, the smother-tackler is more easily supported by team-mates. Tacklers aim to lift a leg of the ball-carrier so that the player can be driven back.

2. Inside support

Key factors - inside support	
1	Assist with the tackle if the ball is available
2	Remain in position to defend the inside channel
3	Position between the ball carrier and the support runners should a player penetrate

The role of the inside support

These players can assist with the smother tackle and ball recovery. Their second role is to defend the inside channel so that they are able to tackle a ball carrier, cutting back towards the source of possession. As a result, they do not cover behind the front line. Once their ball carrier has passed the ball, they retain their position and, as a group, shuffle across, avoiding crossing over because this creates gaps. This prevents them from becoming over committed around the ball.

If a ball carrier penetrates, those nearby move to tackle, while those further away retain their positioning between the ball carrier and the support runners to isolate the ball carrier.

3. Outside support

Key factors - outside support	
1	Maintain alignment
2	Enter play as effectively as possible

The role of the outside support

Alignment allows the outside support to use their peripheral vision to adjust to play inside, while at the same time being aware of the positioning of attackers on the outside.

In situations where the attack outnumbers the defence, they may attempt to tackle from the outside in. If they use a smother tackle, they may be able to prevent or disrupt a pass to the space they have moved from, increasing the amount of time for team-mates to defend the overlap. However, if they do not do this, by coming in they only make matters worse as the unmarked ball carrier will be furthest from the defenders.

If first and second receivers pass early, before they have committed a tackler, the defence line as a unit will be able to drift across the field. These players must be alert to this, but a call may be necessary. This will even up numbers and may even enable more than one player to tackle the ball carrier.

4. The ball recoverer

	Key factors - ball recoverer
1	Be alert as to who is to perform this role
2	Enter play within the Law which is different for the tackler
3	Establish a stable position over the ball
4	Contest possession
5	React to play as it develops

The role of the ball recoverer

While this is a role that number 7 (in particular) and 6 & 8 often specialise in, the skill of recovering the ball after the tackle has become one all team members should have. This then means the role should be performed by the nearest defender. It is usually the defender who has come from inside the ball. In an outside defender moves in to recover and the ball is immediately available, then the attackers may be able to move the ball away to the outside, where there is now more space.

In entering play after the tackle, the player, by Law, has to become from behind the ball. As soon as the tackle is completed, the player who is standing can seize the ball as this player is on his/her feet.

This is often a congested area. Ideally, the player should straddle the ball, sinking at the hips and bending at the knees to pick it up in a stable position. Because of the congestion the player may be forced to reach over the ball-carrier to seize the ball. It is worth contesting the ball against the impact of players cleaning out, until a ruck has been formed. Once this has occurred and the attempt has been unsuccessful, the player should join the defensive screen.

If possession is retained, the delivery of the ball is slow and the opposition has few numbers in the ruck, it is good practice for two or three defenders to bind as a unit and drive the opposition back. At the very least, they will further slow down the attack, and at best, recover the ball. Whether to enter play or not depends on whether the player can see the ball and can drive in a low, stable body position towards it.

If the ball carrier is smother tackled, the recoverer could assist in preventing the ball being released at the maul, leading to a turn over.

The back three

1. Ball recoverer / catcher

	Key factors - ball recoverer / catcher
1	Be in a position to move towards the ball
2	Be in a position to move towards the nearest touch line, once the ball has been recovered
3	Divide the field so that numbers 11, 14 & 15 cover all options
4	Recover the ball
5	If the opposition penetrates, move forward to tackle the ball carrier
6	Assess counter attacking options and perform them

The role of the ball recoverer / catcher

Positioning

If a player is standing directly under a ball that the opposition can contest, the contest will almost certainly be won by the opposition, who will be able to run and leap, catching the ball in the air. Because of this, the back three should stand away from the most likely areas the ball is to be kicked into and, knowing where they are, move into them to catch or leap and catch the ball.

As the back three, these players frequently field the ball with little support, as team-mates are in an offside position. By being further infield, they are able to catch the ball facing the nearest touchline, reducing the distance they need to kick to touch to restart play.

As play develops

The most frequently used catcher is the number 15, and it is this player who should organise the wings to cover the territory. From set pieces, as the ball moves across the field, the 15 will push forward the open-side wing, move into this player's position and pull the blind-side wing into the space vacated. From scrums this will be more difficult as the blind-side wing will initially have to join the front line of defence, forcing the 15 to defend behind the scrum and the open-side wing to move closer to the centre of the field. Once again, as play develops on the open-side, the open-side wing moves forward, and the number 15 and the blind-side wing move across the field.

For open-side attacks, the time at which the forward movement of the open-side wing will take place will depend whether the attacking number 12 has the ability to kick the ball. If the player is able to kick then the movement of the open-side wing will have to be delayed. The open-side wing and number 15 should work out between them who is to recover the potential crossfield kick from the number 12. The open-side wing is in a better position, but any delay will create attacking space on the outside. If the number 15 is left to recover the ball, the flight of the ball usually moves it away from the player, making recovery difficult.

2. Support players

Key factors - support players	
1	Move to support the ball recoverer
2	Communicate the options available
3	React to the options chosen

The role of support players

The initial support players are the remaining two players of the back three. To support, they must be behind the recoverer and close enough to support immediately. The exception to this is, if the ball is contestable, to have one player behind and one in front.

Based on the space available, the support player should let the recoverer know the time available and the most likely options. These options are most likely to be:

• to catch the ball either standing on the ground or leaping into the air and accept the impact
• to set up phase play
• to kick to touch or to gain territory
• to run forward and find support to continue play
• to draw the defence and pass to the space created to counter attack

React to the ball barrier's options
Once possession has been regained, the support player must complement the ball carrier's role. Playing position does not matter. If contact is immediate, then the support player's role will be to either recover tackled ball, set up a ruck or set up a maul. In these circumstances, a maul is preferable as it will give time for other support players to get back and assist. If there is time to kick or pass, the support player will become a chaser or be ready to receive a pass as a support player in the counter attack.

Patterns of play:
counter attack

Aim

Once possession has been regained, to move the ball as far as possible down the field, while either retaining possession or creating a situation in which possession may be regained.

Counter attack overview

While it is best to pass or carry the ball down the field, the defence may prevent this. In some situations, the counter attack may have drawn the defence forward, creating space in behind. Kicking into that space and chasing may lead to a better field position, and possession may be regained. This occurs especially when kicks are made close to a touchline, but not actually into touch.

Functional roles

1. Initiator
2. Support players

1. Initiator

	Key factors - counter attack initiator
1	Secure possession of the ball
2	Assess the situation and the options available
3	Act immediately - this usually involves moving the ball quickly to space
4	Support once these initial actions have been completed

The role of the counter attack initiator

When this player is securing the ball, team-mates should be letting the initiator know what space is available and what the options are.

Options
The options will initially be based on the space between the initiator and the opposition. If there is no space, it may be necessary to form a maul. This ensures possession is retained and that the opposition converges to contest the maul, which in turn creates space to attack if and when the ball is delivered.

If there is sufficient space and time to react immediately, the options are to pass as long as there are support players standing in space, run evasively when there are few defenders, or to kick to space and chase. This last option would be used only if the previous two are not viable, because possession if often conceded when the ball is kicked.

Finally, if the defence is some distance away, they have time and space to spread out to react to stop the counter attack. The initiator can reduce this time and space by running forward towards them before passing wide. As they converge, space is created elsewhere across the field.

Passing early
If the initiator passes early or runs away from the defence, they will be able to drift into the space. This will only be successful if the counter attack is reversed back into the space from which the initiator of the ball has been moved, i.e., away from the space the defence is drifting into.

Only after completing these initial tasks should the initiator move in support.

2. Support players

Key factors - counter attack support players	
1	Inform the initiator of the situation
2	Support in depth so that play can be moved into space
3	React to the actions of the initiator
4	Run to create space
5	Pass to that space
6	Support once these initial actions have been completed

The role of counter attack support players

React to the space available

The initial space between the initiator and the defence determines the support players' actions. These may be either to form a maul, receive a pass or chase the ball when it is kicked.

To become involved in any of these, they must be deep enough to move into play. The only difference is in their width. The closer the opposing players, the closer these players should be to the initiator, e.g., if the initiator is leaping to catch a contested ball, support players need to be bound together to keep the player on his/her feet and form a maul.

If there is plenty of space, these players can be wide offering passing options. While it is desirable for the initiator to run to commit the defence, this is not always possible. In situations in which the receiver is some distance away, the initiator may have to run forward and across to pass accurately. This is not the ideal situation.

In general, because a player's line of running draws the defence in the direction the player is running, support players must move into the space that has been created. Thus, if the initiator runs right, space to attack into this area will be reduced. When too much of the space has been taken away, the support player should move into the space that the initiator is creating, i.e., back to the left.

The reverse is, of course, true, if the initiator runs left.

As a rule, space is created by the ball carrier running straight down the field or slightly towards the greater mass of opposing players. Both these actions will cause the defence to converge creating space elsewhere into which the ball can be passed.

Once the ball has been passed, the player should run in support.

Module 5 - Game plan

Overview

Game plans are the patterns of play that are used to defeat a particular opponent. They are patterns for the next match based on variables unique to that match. The team's patterns of play should be adjusted based on the specific conditions and circumstances for the game, and a profile of the opposing team.

The patterns of play are the general patterns of how a team will play. While there may be variations within them, they represent substantially what a team will do to achieve its game plan.

Tactical variations will usually be a change of emphasis. They will depend on a number of factors or variables unique to the match to be played. The aim of the change of emphasis is to gain an advantage over the opposing team.

So, game plans depend on the variables unique to a particular match. Some of these are:
• The strengths and weaknesses of the opposing team
• The direction and strength of the wind
• The ground conditions
• Other climatic variables such as temperature and rain
• The referee
• The time in the season
• The score and the time remaining during a game.

1. The opposing team profile

Team profiling is the method that is used to change the emphasis in the patterns of play to gain an advantage over an opposing team.

When patterns are just being established, for example early in the playing season, an opposing team profile may not be necessary. In some instances there may not be the opportunity to draw one up. However, when the outcome of a match becomes more important towards the end of the season, game plans will be more important, and so will the opposing team profile.

2. The direction and strength of the wind

To be significant, the wind has to be reasonably strong. Examples of the wind affecting play can be summarised as follows:-

Head wind
• Retain possession
• Be close to the touch-line
• Create and use the blindside to progress the ball down the field

- Contest opponent's lineout ball especially if the throw-in is not straight because of the wind
- Field position is of less importance than the retention of possession
- To retain possession the team must go forward
- The head wind assists passing, so long as the players are deep enough to run onto the ball.

A following wind
- Use the wind to gain field position
- Play the match in the centre of the field; avoid the touchlines
- Score points by positive play, do not rely on the wind to do it
- Do not kick away possession
- Follow all kicks to a pattern and pressure the opposition receiver.

A side-on wind
- As this will affect the flight of the ball, it will affect lineout throw-ins, passing and kicking
- If the opposing number 10 can only kick with one foot, it is best to play down the touchline to which the player's kicking leg is closest in order to reduce the kicking angle and the player's effectiveness as a kicker.

3. Ground conditions

The variables are hard and dry; wet and muddy. They will affect the players' speed and their ability to change direction and handle the ball. It will also affect the bounce of the ball.

4. Temperature

Extremes of temperature will affect the players' ability to perform and increase the likelihood of fatigue. Appropriate playing clothing and liquid refreshments can be used to guard against this.

5. Rain

This will affect both the field conditions and the surface of the ball, which may affect the players' ability to run and handle.

6. The referee

Individual referees have their own ways of managing the game. However, a good referee is consistent in the application of the Laws throughout the game. The players require real skill to get to understand as early as possible what the referee wants and then work out how to meet these demands.

7. The time in the season

The position a team has in the league table at a particular stage in the season will influence how the team plays.

Two situations are likely:
• when a team holds a position and wishes to retain that position
• when a team needs to win in order to avoid relegation or to reach the play-offs.

In the first case, the team may play conservatively taking few risks and playing to a game plan that is based on the field position and possession. This may also apply to a team that is trying to avoid relegation. In the second situation, a team will tend to play to a more expansive game plan in order to win. This may also apply to a team that is unable to make the play-offs but is not threatened by relegation.

8. The score and time remaining

A conservative game plan will tend to be played by the team winning the match closer to full-time. However, the opposite will be true of the losing team.

Summary

The extent to which these tactical factors influence the team's game plan will vary greatly. Remember, game plans are based on the patterns of play. It is a matter of emphasis and the importance of each factor will vary greatly.

The most important is the opposition team profile. But even here it is important that a team plays positively to impose its own game plan, rather than to play as a reaction to what the opposing team may be doing.

Module 6 - Achievement strategies
6.1 - Periodised planning

Overview

Many coaches may have responded to this question by stating that they have an idea in their head as to what will happen in a session, week or month, but don't really write it down in much detail. It is true that many coaches never formally plan ahead a week, month or season. If this is the case with you, this unit will help you and your athletes a lot.

Why plan?

Planning is beneficial for the following reasons:

• Provides balance in the athlete's life
• Prompts coach organisation
• Makes sure all aspects of training are considered
• Gives athletes the opportunity to achieve their potential
• Allows coaches to measure their effectiveness and that of their athletes
• Motivates coaches and athletes

Provides balance in the athlete's life

Athletes at all levels, but particularly advanced level athletes, who have to juggle many aspects of life, as well as focus on their sporting performance (often at a very young age) need a *balanced approach* to make sure they achieve their goals in all areas of their lives.

A good coach will be involved in this process and their planning will help the athletes to continue to develop as a person and as an athlete.

Prompts coach organisation

Unfortunately most (if not all) athletes have been involved in unplanned and often ineffective coaching sessions. As a coach, you have the responsibility to provide quality training sessions for your athletes. If you are not providing these services, you are not meeting your coaching obligations. Planning plays a very important role in coaches providing quality services and should therefore be a key component of all coaching programs.

If you are achieving success as a coach without planning, chances are that this due to a combination of luck, natural coaching talent and very talented athletes. This success may also be short lived if you don't plan. You may have heard the old saying *"Failing to plan is planning to fail"*. It may sound corny, but it is very true in coaching.

A lot of coaches do not plan extensively as they believe it is too hard and takes too much time. The truth of the matter is that *planning will save you time, not waste it*. How many times have you showed up to a practice session (as either an athlete or a coach) and one or more of the following has occurred?

• People arrive late
• Some people don't show up at all
• The equipment is not there
• Athletes didn't bring their water bottles
• Someone else is using the field

If you answered yes to any of these, I am sure you will agree that sessions like these waste everybody's time and are definitely not fun. This will not occur if the coach **and** the athletes plan.

Makes sure all aspects of training are considered

Planning effective sessions, microcycles (weekly plans) and macrocycles (monthly plans) does not simply need the coach to think about the types of drills they may like to use. Development of athlete performance (particularly as athletes become more advanced) requires coaches to plan for and deliver sessions which develop a range of capacities. These will include:

• Skill development
• Fitness / physical development
• Tactical development
• Psychological skill development

Gives athletes the opportunity to achieve their potential

Whatever the goals and potential of an athlete are, a key role of the coach is to guide the athlete's development towards achieving these goals and potential. It should be quite clear that if the individual needs and wants of the athlete are not planned for, chances are they won't be met.

Allows coaches to measure their effectiveness and that of their athletes

If you have been coaching an athlete for a year and they have improved a lot, how do you know what brought about this improvement and what slowed it down? If sessions, weeks and months are not planned and recorded, the effectiveness of activities cannot be accurately measured.

Planning allows the coach to map the development of the athlete and see what worked, what did not work and what should be changed to encourage ongoing improvement. If a coach doesn't plan and analyse the outcomes of their sessions, they may have their athletes doing activities which actually **slow down** athlete development.

Motivates coaches and athletes

Before different types of plans are discussed, it is very important that coaches **involve the athletes in the planning process**. This will give the athletes a sense of ownership over their training, increase their motivation to train and bring about improved results. Ask the athletes what they need to improve on and how they could do this. **Don't be scared to involve the athletes.**

Types of coaching plans

When planning, a coach needs to consider many things, including:

• Family, school and work commitments of the athletes and themselves
• **Stage of athlete development and ability**
• What is the session / week / month trying to achieve?
• **Time of the season**
• **Types of competitions**
• **What resources are available to them (i.e. training location / equipment)**
• **Environmental factors**
• **Attitudes of the athletes**
• **Injuries**
• **Specific demands of the sport**
• Are the athletes at risk?
• Can I vary the sessions?
• How will I measure the success of the program?
• **Contingency plans ("Plan B")**

There are many types of plans, ranging from one activity within a session, through to 4-year Olympic cycles. The common categories of coaching plans are:

• Long-term Plans (up to 4 years)
• Yearly / season plans (mesocycles)
• **Monthly plans (macrocycles)**
• **Weekly plans (microcycles)**
• Session plans

Yearly coaching plans

It is important for a coach to think ahead when undertaking any planning activity. If a coach simply plans each session a couple of hours before the session is delivered, they are likely to not consider many issues which should be included if the long-term development of the athlete is to continue.

A good way for coaches to plan is to work backwards. This means working backwards from year (mesocycle) – month (macrocycle) – week (microcycle) – session. This process allows the coach to consider factors such as competition schedules, venue availability, the developmental level of the athlete/s (physically and psychologically), other commitments of the athlete/s and more, when planning programs.

It is important for the advanced level coach to have a basic understanding of the phases of the yearly plan. This understanding allows the advanced coach to develop monthly coaching plans which will specifically meet the needs of their athletes, based on the individual athlete and the training phase they are in.

A major reason for having a yearly coaching plan is to be able to schedule the various stages of the training year. This will then allow the coach to design suitable training activities within each phase to bring about optimal performance in major competitions.

The year can be divided into 3 basic phases. Broad guidelines for each are given here.

Transition phase
• Recovery between seasons (2–6 weeks)
• Active recovery to maintain base fitness
• Try other sports and recreation activities
• Assess the year
• Come back fresh and ready to begin training in the preparatory phase.

Preparation phase
• Develop physical capacities (start with lower intensity work and progress)
• Do not overlook skill / technical development
• Make sure that individual athlete development needs are met.

Competition phase
• Refinement / maintenance of skills
• Specific technical, physical and psychological elements to be trained
• Recovery process is vital
• Volume (amount) of training drops
• **Training should look to mirror game / competition needs where possible.**

Monthly plans

Monthly plans provide coaches and athletes with a skeletal (broad) framework, from which more specific weekly and session plans can be developed. One mistake coaches can sometimes make is to be too detailed in their development of monthly training plans. Some coaches have developed detailed session plans for their athletes, 1-6 months in advance and, for a range of reasons (athlete injury, illness, etc.), have then had to totally re-develop these session plans.

An example of a skeletal monthly coaching plan can be seen on the following page.

Capacity	Week 1 training activities	Week 2 training activities	Week 3 training activities	Week 4 training activities
Skill development	Catching and passing under pressure	Short kicking and line defence	Basic set plays	Advanced set plays
Speed development	Speed endurance	Speed endurance	Speed endurance	Speed endurance
Strength development				
Power development				
Agility development	Defensive drills and games	Defensive drills and games	Attacking drills and games	Attacking drills and games
Endurance development				
Flexibility development	Dynamic flexibility	Dynamic flexibility	Static flexibility	Static flexibility
Psychological skills	Visualisation	Visualisation	Making decisions under pressure	Making decisions under pressure
Recovery activities	Warm-downs	2 x specific recovery sessions	Warm-downs	2 x specific recovery sessions

Session plans

Each session will vary, however there are certain components that most sessions should include. These are:

• Pre-session talk
• Warm-up
• Skill instruction
• Skill practice / development through modified games and other activities
• Conditioning (this can also happen in the skill practice section of the session)
• Conclusion.

Pre-session talk: A short time where the coach explains the goals of the session and sets the appropriate tone.

Warm-up: Lets athletes prepare physically and psychologically for the training session ahead.

Skill instruction: The coach briefly outlines the skills that are to be focused on during the session, explains **why** they will be focused on and demonstrates the correct techniques.

Skill practice / development through modified games and other activities: Athletes have the chance to apply the skills they have learnt in a modified game or game situation. The coach should ensure maximum participation by all athletes, as well as making the activities specific to the game needs. This section can also include conditioning through active modified games.

Conditioning: There **may** be the need to devote some time to conditioning. If so, it is best done after the skill development section of the session.

Conclusion: Includes a warm-down (physical and psychological) and a review of the key teaching points of the session.

Contingency planning (your "Plan B")

An important aspect of planning is "contingency planning". This is the ability of the coach to make changes to their coaching plans and activities, as needed, to meet the ever changing needs of the athletes.

Regardless of how prepared coaches and athletes are, things will rarely go exactly to plan. Coaches need to have the ability to draw upon contingency ("Plan B") skills, as needed. Although things can go wrong at any time, for a range of reasons (some of which cannot be planned for), coaches can plan to be able to deal with problems as they arise.

Commonly planned for contingencies may include (but are not limited to):

• *Heat*
• *Cold*
• *Court surfaces*
• *Injury*
• *Illness*
• *Lack of equipment*
• *Lack of athletes (e.g. the whole team does not show up to training)*
• *Rain.*

Module 6 - Achievement strategies
6.2 - Pre-game logistics planning

Planning steps

Step 1 – formulate your planning group
Who would be in your planning group? This may vary for each event.

Step 2 - identify all items to be included
Identify all the events that have to be scheduled. The following checklist may be used, though it is probably more comprehensive than you need, so eliminate any that you feel don't apply and add any that are not included in the checklist that you think are needed.

Types of meetings
• Review of the last game
• One-on-ones
• Pre-practice briefings
• Practices
• Selection meeting
• Team selection and announcement
• Preview for the next game
• Pre-match team meeting
• Halftime team meeting
• Post game meetings
• Coaching / management teams meetings
• Captain's run
Other events
• The game
• Pre-game at the venue
• First half
• Second half
• Post game recovery
• Pre – game before arrival at the venue
• Team assembly
• Domestic travel
• Personnel travel
• Pre-game meals
• Post game recovery
• Post game nutrition

Step 3 - duration and timing

Next it is a good idea to decide which items on your logistical plan have to occur at a fixed time, and which you can schedule according to your needs. At this stage you should also analyse how long each item on your logistics plan will take, and where applicable, book an appropriate time slot.

But should the unexpected occur, and the schedule have to be changed, what strategy would you adopt to ensure the plan retains its coherence?

The following are some examples of what could occur:
1. Flight delays when travelling overseas.
2. Injury to key players at the final team practice.
3. Accommodation unacceptable at a new location.
4. Injured players having to remain in medical care after the departure time.

Meeting strategy checklists

Which principles of play will be focused on?
   Attack Principles
   • Gaining possession
   • Going forward
   • Supporting
   • Continuity
   • Pressure
   • (Turnovers)
   Structure
   • Key Points
   • Emphasis
   • Targeted Players
   Defence principles
   • Contesting possession
   • Going forward
   • Applying pressure / tackling
   • Preventing territorial gain / tackling quality
   • Supporting
   • Regaining possession / turnovers
   • Counter attacking
   Structure
   • Key points
   • Emphasis
   • Targeted players

What is the objective of the meeting?
• The objective of the pre-match team meeting is to motivate the players to play to the best of their ability within the tactics that have been established.

Conducting the meeting
• when should the meeting take place?
• where should the meeting take place?
• what are the key points?
• how should they be emphasised?
• which players should be targeted?
• what part should the players have in the discussion?
• how long should the meeting be?
Note: The meeting is for the benefit of the players.

Half time team meeting
   Purpose
      • Player welfare
      • Player opinion
      • Make changes to the team if necessary
      • Tactical changes
      • Cohesion for the second half.
   Structure
      • Duration – 10/15 minutes
      • Sub-division of time:
         - Player physical needs – first aid, injury report and status, hydration etc.
         - Player views
         - Key messages
            • Who is to deliver them?
            • What are the messages?
            • How many messages should be conveyed?
                  - What feedback do you want?
            • Players own time

Checklist for team practice sessions

   Types of practice session
      • Recovery
      • Patterns of play
      • Tactics
      • The Captain's run
   Logistics
      • Time, duration and date
      • Areas of concern
      • Session aim
      • Equipment

Module 6 - Achievement strategies
6.3 - Critical incident analysis

Quick thinking

Intuitive quick thinking focuses on the team performance - not the outcomes, which can be a distraction.

Comprehensive methods of analysis may ensure a high degree of certainty when they are the basis of decision making, but they take too much time for them to be effective during a game. In addition, it is important that coaches are not placed in a situation in which the number of variables or issues that have to be taken into account are too great, given the limited time coaches have to prepare a team.

Intuition based on long exposure to Rugby situations enables experienced coaches to make decisions quickly and with a high degree of accuracy. The accuracy with which you make decisions is based on using an analytical framework for the activity. Frequently, this framework is in the sub-conscious and is a tool of the trade enabling you to achieve quick and fairly accurate decision that will enable a problem to be solved.

The Pareto principle / the 80:20 rule

The Pareto principle states that, for many events, 80% of the consequences stem from 20% of the causes. It is used in quality control because of the accuracy it provides with relatively little effort. To apply it to situations in the mode of play you can deduce that the consequences of play are caused by a relatively small and manageable number of causes.

The greater your exposure to the Game in an intense way, not as a spectator but as a coaching practitioners, the more reliable your quick thinking will be and the more precise will be the causes upon which you focus. Initially, your accuracy will be greater in the most frequently-occurring patterns and, in time, you will become accurate in those occurring less frequently. In addition, the detail with which you read a situation will increase.

Intuitive quick thinking focuses on the team performance, not the outcomes which can be a distraction.

On the following page is a real 'worked example' from a match.

Oceania Cup Final Papua New Guinea vs Nuie

Conditions:

There was a downfield wind so an example of a tactical approach is for the team winning the toss to play into the wind in the first half, monopolising possession to at least reduce the half-time margin, and then play 'downhill' in the second half, with the wind allowing the team to play a territory game. To have the wind in the first half can be little advantage as time is wasted 'getting into' the game, especially when the two teams playing know little about each other.

Below is a log of critical incidents based on what was seen during play. In the analysis:

N = Niue, PNG = Papua New Guinea, KO = Kickoff, LO = Lineout, PK = Penalty kick, # = the number of the player, GL= goal line.

No.	FIRST HALF Critical incident	SECOND HALF Critical incident
1	PNG KO recoverable with better technique.	Problem at phase play continues for both sides.
2	N gained field position in PNG half.	N KO recoverable but PNG won the ball. N look at KO technique so jumpers are running towards the ball outside in.
3	LO uncontested by PNG.	PNG #15 clears to N 22m line. KO N leads to PNG scrum.
4		N scrum turned PNG scrum to touch and able to force PNG back. PNG re-group using maul and go to 4 phases leading to reasonably quick ball, each broke the GL.
5	N – slow ball, gain line not met and PNG got turnover.	N #10 didn't find touch from PK, PNG re-cycle and go forward. Flat and ball spilt but N high tackle gives PNG PK.
6	PNG attacked wide out, N tacklers square on and upright, easily beaten on the inside. PNG continue play breaking the gain line at 2 rucks.	PNG LO ball not caught, no one jumped. Ball falls for PNG #7 and he gets to GL. Support quick and #2 scores. PNG 27 N12 #13 C PNG 29 N12
7	PNG momentum lost as N forced them to touch.	N Playing into the wind are getting caught with the need to clear their terr and the need to score points from too far out.
8	PNG taps back, N moves onto the ball but PNG re-group and go forward over the GL.	PNG regained contestable N KO.
9		N D around ruck and wide out under pressure due to individual and unit technique. The pace of PNG exposed this. N need to attack post tackle ball to create delay and allow D to get into position.
10	PNG #3 is a handful.	PNG mark, N penalised for off-side and PNG able to return to the position of offence for PK.
11	PNG screwed scrum clock-wise	N succession of phases created an overlap but #1 at first receiver took it up, opportunity lost.
12		N PK not to goal but to touch. N #2 closed down by PNG #2 getting in front.

No.	FIRST HALF Critical incident	SECOND HALF Critical incident
13	N tackling once again poor and PNG went beyond gain line with support play.	N #8 broke GL from scrum but penalised as held onto ball in tackle, support too late.
14		PNG LO lost, no one jumped.
15	#13 PNG PK – 3-0.	N forwards now using pick and go and leg drive is creating momentum but re-cycling too slow for backs to exploit initial advantage.
16	PNG runs square onto the ball creating options	N scrum crouch too high.
17		N backs supporting at the tackle along with loose forwards, when ball won few in A line and most tight forwards.
18	PNG scrum tackle missed by #12 N and PNG able to get past GL.	N PK to touch with little terr gain. All they are doing is going for contestable ball at the LO.
19	PNG scrum advanced LH side and secured a turnover.	N Drive at LO, 3 phases with pick and go in between followed by quick ball exploited the overlap and #11 beats D on outside to score. N 17 PNG 29
20		PNG KO long N #10 puts ball out on 10m N terr
21	N KO gained reasonable territory and LO N ball inside PNG terr.	PNG LO tapped back – N pressure -, attack line didn't adjust and received ball flat, ruck ball slow leading to #9 KO. PNG backline in too big a hurry to do things and getting flat.
22		Both teams re-cycling too slow and backs starved of possession.
23		N chase pattern in the hope of a return kick not to tackle the BC.
24	PNG scrum pushed N off the ball leading to a turnover.	N KO from kick being chest on not side on. PNG scrum just outside N22m.
25	PNG penalty on their GL ball moved through 5 pairs of hands and play ended up in touch on halfway PNG ball.	PNG go blindside using pick and go to break GL.
26	PNG won N ball, anything beyond #2 is being won by PNG. PNG untidy ball turnover PNG.	N back and forward commitment to wide out tackle leaving limited attack line to use the ball.
27		PNG LO ball tap ball but #9 good enough to clear by positioning outside the ball.
28	PNG 22m cleared to inside N half. Ball moved and #13 penetrated, #14 recovered the kick ahead to score PNG 10 – 5. Converted by #10 10-7.	N tackling real problem as can't win the contest at contact to the upper body and square on and upright so not in a position to remove the legs.
29		Rash of KO and ref playing advantage from each one, as play continues, fatigue is becoming a factor. Many handling errors – What to do? Settle down and re-est the pattern.

No.	FIRST HALF Critical incident	SECOND HALF Critical incident
31	PNG AL flattened up into the wind and the ball spilt. N drove them back but PNG kept the ball.	N KO contestable, won by PNG.
32	N PK gained 10m before ball in touch.	PNG ruck cleared to touch near N22m, 30m gain.
33	N #2 LO won the ball. Not elsewhere.	N backline feeling the pressure of their GL and the need to score getting anxious and flattening up, passes to the man and not in front and thrown to hard as passer wants to get the ball there before the receiver gets in front.
34	N VG Rolling maul but delivery from a stationary platform.	N GL defence holding up for a number of phases. PNG close support may not be getting a try but pressure is maintained by go forward and ball retention.
35	N depth allowed them to run onto the ball and, at pace step the defenders. At the breakdown backs tentative to go in and play as loose forwards.	N defence to upper body necessary near GL to stop BC scoring in the tackle.
36	PNG regained the ball and cleared to touch.	Anxiety leading to flat attacking lines, can't run onto the ball.
37	#2 reliable at LO but, being at the front the tail end of the PNG LO not committed and D A.	#9 N lashed out in the tackle – no Judiciary please!
38	N backline relying on creating space round a defender and winning the one-on-one. PNG backline using decoys to create space and players entering from behind at pace into the space.	N 1st and 2nd receivers in backline passing hard, flat and low, miss pass led to spilt ball and PNG D regain and #13 try. PNG 39 N17 C #22 missed. PNG by securing field position and patiently attacking while retaining ball have made N play beyond their skill set in this part of the field creating pressure in both A and D. D as good as it would have been in any other part of the field taking away the space N needs to clear own terr.
39	N PK missed by #10	N KO not to 10m line, while N waiting for it to do so PNG grabbed the ball and, using support, took play to N 22m line.
40	From 22m dropout N counter attack got the ball to PNG 10m line. DG attempt by #10 missed.	N scrum wheeling clockwise in D and #9 able to pressure PNG #9. PNG scrum needs to remain square and push until ball is in #10 hands, Channelling also an issue.
41	PNG recovered own 22m dropout. N defence forced player into touch just in PNG half.	N kicked ahead and chased. They out numbered PNG but no communication as to who was tackling who, #15 PNG broke to 22m line passed it to #11 to score. Good counter attack. PNG 44 N 17 C #13 Final Score PNG 51 N17 I have missed a try somewhere?
42	PNG counter attack following #15 mark played too flat into the wind and handling led to KO.	

Module 6 - Achievement strategies
6.4 - Practice planning

Constructing a practice session

A practice session deals with four elements of preparation:

• Skill development
• Physical preparation
• Mental preparation
• Decision making, tactical awareness and the implementation of the game profile and patterns of play.

The objectives of these are both to prepare the team for the next game and to maintain continual improvement for their whole season. Coaching within the period between one game and the next must achieve a balance between each of these elements. This means that there will be an integration of fitness, skill and decision-making, how they should complement each other in the team's performance.

In order to plan effectively, it is important to take into consideration two crucial aspects of the mode of play in Rugby.

The first of these is that Rugby is a game of ever-changing situations. Seldom is one skill performed repetitively in a game. So at practice it is unrealistic to have players perform one skill many times, one after the other. While a player may have to make a tackle, the next role may be forming up in the defensive screen, maintaining the offside line, moving forward as part of the defensive line, drifting with the pass and grabbing a ball that has become loose. Similar situations occur in attack with the mixture of passing, receiving a pass, evading, supporting, and binding and driving at phase play. Consequently, as soon as players are technically competent, which they will achieve by repetition, the performance of the skill should be integrated into play that begins to approach the game situation.

Secondly, Rugby is a game that is never performed perfectly. The game is an open-skilled game in which opposition in a variety of forms prevents the perfect performance. Consequently, it is unrealistic to practice as if perfect performance can be achieved. This reality depends on the use of opposition so that the players are learning to adapt to the situation as it develops. In a team run-through, at the conclusion of the final practice, in which all things are put together in one place, the lack of opposition can frequently result in a very satisfying performance. This performance is not the result of outstanding skill, but of a lack of opposition. Reserve players can provide some opposition, but even they may not be numerous enough to create a real situation. As coach you have to build into the practice opposition and frequent change in an attempt to simulate match play. If this is not done, the team will develop false confidence and may not be able to adjust when they are faced with the opposing team in a game.

Until now, we have identified the broad area that the practice should deal with. The task is now to break down this area into its components, starting from individual skills, building this through increasing numbers of players from pairs to threes to fours, fives, sixes, sevens and eights. With each step more players are involved and their complementary actions reinforce the decision-making components of the practice. It will also assist in developing fitness because when more players are used each time the rest period will be used less.

If there is enough time players may receive coaching specifically for their playing position.

Practice intensity

The combination of fitness, skill development and decision-making create the complementary elements that intensify the practice.

To develop fitness the progression during the pre-season and early season period will be from aerobic fitness and flexibility to strength and speed and finally to anaerobic fitness and power. When the season is fully underway, it will be difficult to make fitness gains at the same time as playing well in each game. During this period, fitness training should maintain the levels of fitness so that the team does not become fatigued, thereby affecting their performance in their matches. The level of fitness will impact on the composure of the player, the ability to perform the skills successfully and the player's ability to make decisions.

The link between the ability to succeed in the other two components and levels of fitness cannot be over-emphasised. As a result, one of the roles of the coach in the pre-season period, probably the most important role, is to make sure that the players have a sound aerobic and strength base to make sure that their fitness level throughout the season is high enough to win games using the game plan developed from the team's game profile. In other words, fitness is not simply a generic concept, it is relative to the players in the team and the style of play determined by the coaches and players. Speed and power can be included provided there is sufficient time to establish the base.

The intensification of skills practice initially comes from performing the basic individual skills many, many times. These must be performed over and over again with the intensity being increased by a number of factors. The most common of these are:

• A reduction in the space available, i.e., performing a skill in a smaller area with a greater number of players around so that there is less time and space. The most important skills of the game, those that impact most on play, are those that are performed close to, if not in contact with, other players.

• A reduction in recovery time, so that players perform the skill with the progressive reduction in the time the player has to recover.

• An increase in the level of opposition progressing from a situation in which the reduction of time and space being the only "opposition" to opposition that plays within options set by the coach, so that the players develop competence before they are opposed as they would be in a game. In some situations the opposition may be greater than in a game, so that the players are over-loaded. While it seldom happens, this last step should result in the player finding the game a little easier than the practice. What usually happens is that it enables the player to be more involved and able to be more accurate in what they are doing.

Example – practising attack and defence

Coaches must recognise that the skills of attack are greater, more complex and more subtle than the skills of defence.

Practicing attack and defence are complementary. It is the art of attack to find and exploit space while the crucial defensive skill is to cope with greater attacking numbers. So what is good for the attack is equally good for the defence.

So that attacking players learn to read the cues given by the movement of the defence and to react to it successfully, it is necessary for the attackers to outnumber the defenders and for the defenders to react to the attack in a pre-determined way decided by the coach. Initially the defender will react using only one option in a two-on-one situation. This will be to defend the ball carrier.

Once the attack is successful at reacting to this situation, then the defender may be given the option of defending the ball carrier or the second attacking player. The ball carrier and the second attacker learn to react to both defending options.

If they are unsuccessful it may be necessary to use three attackers against one defender and to build the level of success and player confidence from this point.

In both situations this process continues so that as players develop confidence and react successfully to the cues, more attackers and defenders can be added, thereby creating greater complexity. However, because the Game is one in which attacking players create space for an additional attacking player to go forward and penetrate, the attack should always be greater than the defence, forcing a decision as to which attackers they are to defend. The skill that is being developed is the skill to identify and pass to the player who is not defended.

In attack certain standard situations frequently occur in a game. These are analysed in the table below.

Attackers	Defenders	Defender's action	Attacker's reaction
2	1	• Defend first attacker • Defend the second attacker	• Pass to the second attacker – the overlap • Dummy pass and run forward
3 in a line	2	• Defend the first and second attackers • Defend second and third attackers • Defend first and third defenders	• Draw and pass to use the overlap • First attacker dummy passes and runs • Second attacker takes the gap.
3 2 in line 1 behind	3	• Defend the front line • Defend the front line but with the first defender moving to defend the entry of the player behind between the two in front • Defend the front line but with the second defender moving to defend the entry of the player behind between the two in front • Defend the front line of defence and, if penetration is achieved, defend the second line	• Player behind penetrates • First attacker dummy passes and takes the gap • First attacker passes past the attacker entering from behind to the second attacker in the front line

The number in attack and defence can be increased combining the use of decoy runners. All are based on variations to the patterns explained in the table.

All these situations can be equally well used to practice defence as they are standard situations that occur in defence as well as in attack. It is a matter of where the coach places the emphasis and what the needs of the team are. If there are two coaches then one can coach the attack and the other the defence.

Another variation is for one coach to focus on the activity and the other on the technical and tactical elements. After each player completes their turn, advice can be given. However players learn better by performing a skill frequently without interruptions. Interruptions can prevent them from developing their own way of attacking and defending. This can be fine-tuned after the players have made a number of attempts. Remember, in this situation the players are practising something that happens too infrequently in a game to lead to a high level of success. Repetition at practice can go a long way towards improving success.

If players are having difficulty, reduce the number of opponents: attackers if defence is being practised and defenders if attack is being practised, or move on to something else and return later in the practice or wait for the next practice. Frequent, intensive practice of relatively short duration gives the best results in decision-making situations.

Other variables that the coach can determine are: how the ball is delivered; the degree of opposition (full game-like tackling and contact or continued opposition); the space between the attackers and defenders.

Whatever may be practiced in opposed training, the keys are to regulate the opposition to achieve the level of decision-making desired and secondly to convince the opposition that they are doing a vital job for the team by maintaining the intensity of the practice. Players have no difficulty maintaining their interest if they are attacking, they are less interested when they are defending.

Decision-making

There are many decisions that are made with great frequency during the course of the game, e.g., who to tackle, when to pass, how to support, who to throw the ball to in a lineout. However, many do not. They occur too infrequently in a game for the level of success to improve, especially in the short term.

Examples of these are:
• Which attacking move to use?
• Which defensive pattern to use should there be more than one to choose from?
• What form of attack to use?
• Whether to take a gap or find support?

To meet the need of these less frequent, but more important decisions, situations must be frequently created at practice that duplicate these decision-making situations. Initially, the recovery time can be great, to enable the player to be composed. Once a high degree of proficiency is reached, the recovery time can be reduced, increasing the intensity.

Secondly, because successful decision-making can be difficult to achieve, players soon become frustrated. It can be better to practice it in small doses, and to return to it often. This gives the players time to reflect so that the decisions are more accurate next time.

By far the most frequent decision players make is to decide on the individual skill they will use from the menu available to complement the action of team-mates. The aim is therefore to increase the menu of skills and to create the player who can make the best choice, not an inferior one because of a lack of skill, and perform the skill without hesitation.

The key skill here is the ability to use both sides of the body - both hands, both shoulders, both feet - the ability to use the less familiar side of the body as comfortably as the familiar side. For most players, the more familiar side is the right. At practice, you have the one opportunity to ensure players practice their less familiar side - something they may not do themselves if not supervised.

Once the parts have been practised and individuals brought together in mini-units of increasing size, the team will need to play to its patterns of play and ultimately to its game plan for the upcoming match. This is best achieved by linking the practice to field position, and linking each aspect of play to the team's options in that field position.

Practice activities

If a successful team uses a particular practice activity, has a practice routine, has a particular pre-match routine or indulges in various superstitions, other teams are tempted to copy these routines.

If there is a good reason for doing something, a reason that fits the personnel that make up the team, then use it. The flaw lies in copying, and overlooking the obvious fact that no two teams are the same and what is successful for one is not necessarily successful for any other.

Consequently, practice activity must be based on the specific needs of the team, so that what is practiced enables the team to perform more successfully their patterns of play and game plan. Players too often separate what is done at practice from what occurs in a game - they don't make the connection. Time is too short for the team to practice anything that is not directly linked to the patterns and game plan. Practice activities must simulate the team's needs. Each part of the practice must be able to be directly uplifted and placed in the patterns of play.

The practice activity can be part of the pre-match, 30 minute warm-up so that the warm-up really becomes part of a 2 hour game of which the match occupies the remaining one and a half hours.

Decision-making practice activities that practice the skills and patterns the team needs to perform in a game are often difficult to create, but because they are based on the team's pattern of play, it is worth the effort. Match analysis enables teams to easily counter moves that are done by rote. What opposing teams have difficulty with is a their opponents' ability to react to their actions. Every action by an opponent will have a range of reactions that will have varying degrees of success. Teams that are able to react using an option that gives a tactical advantage will be very successful and difficult to oppose.

Once again it is a matter of intensity. It is more profitable to practice a limited number of moves and spend time reading the options based on the behaviour of opponents. To practice many moves in the hope that one will work is spreading risks too thinly.

Team success is based on preparation and planning. The lazy coach who fails to plan is therefore planning for failure.