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## An introduction to coaching contact rugby

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## **AN INTRODUCTION TO COACHING CONTACT RUGBY**

Rugby Union is a contact game, the key principles being to win possession of the ball, move forward with the support of teammates, thus maintaining continuity of play to eventually score.

Ideally, contact should be avoided. However, the mechanics of the game determine that contact often cannot be avoided and, in other instances, contact may be the correct decision for the ball carrier in order to group or commit defenders thereby creating space elsewhere.

The role of the coach is to create situations at training where players are exposed to as many match-like scenarios as possible to enable them to make playing decisions, which are based on a true understanding of the game.

This coaching resource is aimed at coaches who are introducing contact to players. However, it also provides simple key factors, coaching points and activities that can be used by coaches at all levels.

# 1. MANAGING CONTACT

Whilst carrying the ball, a player must decide when they should run, pass, kick or go into contact.

Before a player can make this decision correctly, they must first have a basic understanding of the movements of the game.

## 1.1 Understanding the basic concepts of movement

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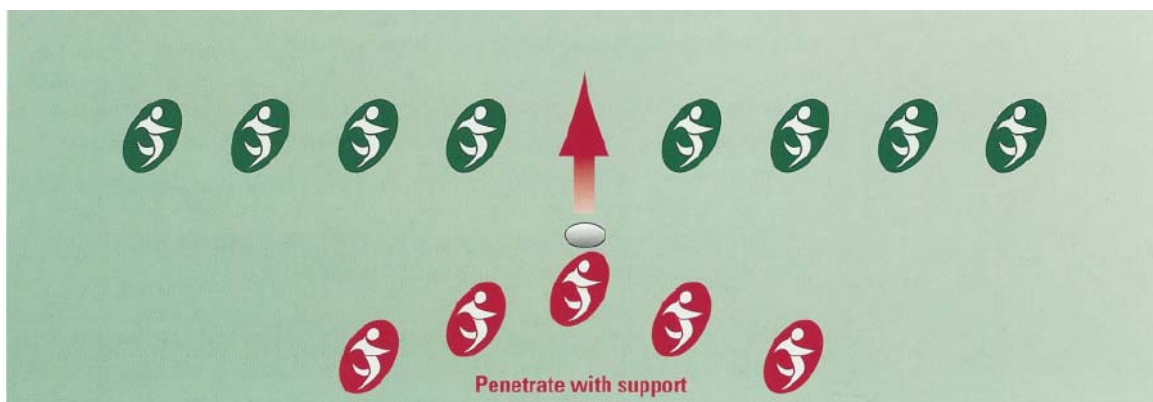
### Shape of the defense

From the 'first phase', both the attacking and defensive sides are at their most organized.

The action of the attack is to disorganize and thus penetrate or outflank the defense. The action of the defense is to nullify the action of the attack.

The attack must then collectively read the reaction of the defense in order to maintain pressure, keep the defense disorganized and thereby penetrate. There are two basic shapes to overcome:

- **Defense spread wide**



- **Defense bunched**



In considering these two shapes, as coach you must give thought to the following:

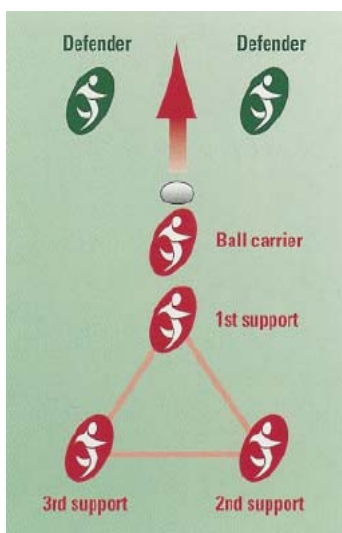
- Recognize the defense shape in front of the players
- How can the attacking team act collectively to overcome the defense?
- Recognize the role of the ball carrier and any supporting players
- What methods of training can be utilized to improve the skills of the players in order to overcome each defensive shape?

## 1.2 Developing effective skills in contact

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The basic objective of rugby union is to gain possession of the ball, move forward, and exploit space using supporting players in order to score. As contact with the opposition is unavoidable, it is important that players understand when and where it is best to make contact with the opposition.

Many players are coached to seek contact regardless of what shape the defense is deploying so that possession is maintained. However, players should be encouraged to avoid contact if at all possible. Teams that understand the continuous game will adopt ploys and skills where the ball can be delivered before contact, in contact or after contact, thus giving less time for the defense to reorganize. The demands on players and coaches wishing to adopt a continuous game style of play are far greater than with a more structured, set piece-driven game plan. The onus is on the players - whether they are the ball carrier, first support, second support or the player furthest from the ball - to make the correct decision and get in a position to support their teammates.



If a player makes the decision to make contact with the opposition, then the following techniques and skills must be adhered to:

- Ensure that the players going into the contact area possess an assertive attitude. A team that dominates the collision phase will normally always retain or gain possession of the ball.
  - The ball carrier and any support players must communicate with each other to ensure that they take the best option available to them.
  - Make sure that the players stay aware at all times by keeping their eyes open and heads up. Players should always be assessing the best option at any particular moment. For example, could a quick pop pass to a teammate avoid the requirement to go into contact?
- Support players must get into the correct position to offer the best options to the ball carrier. For example, three support players can form a 'magic triangle' (shown above), in which the first support sits just behind the ball carrier, with the second and third support players offering further options to the right and left of the two players in front.

## 1.3 Maintaining continuity

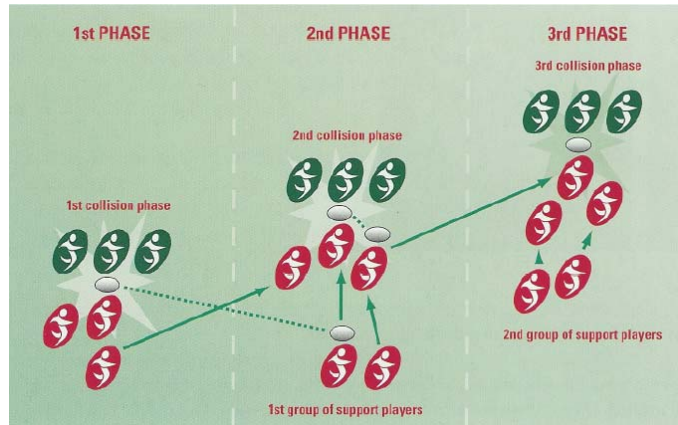
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Once the ball has been secured or possession maintained, decisions should be made as to what to do next. The following questions must be asked:

- What are the defense doing?
- Where is the space?

- Where can players provide the most effective support?

To maintain continuity, support players should decide whether to join the ruck/maul/breakdown, to run in support, to call for the ball, or to run as a decoy. This decision should be based on the answers to the questions on the previous page.



In the example shown on the left, by committing fewer players to the first collision phase, the attacking team is in a position to allow their remaining players to support the next phase. By operating in 'pods' or 'waves', teams should ensure that continuity is maintained as a result of always having players in support of the ball carrier.

However, you should be aware that in committing fewer players to a collision, the ball carrier and immediate support players must work vigorously and aggressively in order to maintain possession. Players must decide quickly where they are most needed. **Simply standing and watching is not an option.**

A series of quick rucks, 'pick and go' or close support running, in which the ball is moved away from the collision areas, should create disorganization within the defense. Space and mismatches can then be exploited to great advantage.

#### 1.4 Contact with the ground

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As well as contact with their opponents and teammates, during play, players will inevitably come into contact with the ground, and sometimes it may be quite hard. It may seem surprising, but players do not necessarily know how to fall down! A natural reaction to falling is to attempt to break the fall with outstretched arms. However, this can result in injury. So develop skills and understanding by using the activities below:

##### Forward roll

- Keep the chin tucked in (control the head, control the fall)
- Eyes open
- Head to the side and make a level surface with shoulder
- Throw the shoulder through to allow transition of weight
- Break fall comes with trailing arm follows through hitting the ground taking the sting out of the fall

### **Side roll**

- Lie down with arms by the side
- Roll over keeping body in elongated 'sausage shape'

### **Side down falls**

- From standing position players fall sideways to the ground 'parachute fall'
- Make the body small
- Shrug shoulders/lose the neck/round the shoulders/cross arms - brace for impact
- Then go to ground falling on side of knee, hip, shoulder

### **Straight down falls**

- From standing position players to fall straight forward to ground
- Player turns fall into a side down by turning prior to impact
- Do not fall onto outstretched hands

### **Sit and roll back/stand and roll back**

- Keep head to the side and make a smooth surface with shoulder
- Do not roll over the head

It is important to progress by:

- Start slow increasing speed with confidence and practice
- Start low to the ground
- In later stages introduce ball

Further activities would include:

- Cart wheels
- Hand stand to forward roll (as shown)

These practices should be used initially on soft ground or on tackle shields to encourage confidence and ensure safety. To continue the development of players ensure that practice is included for both sides of the body (left and right).

## 1.5 Contact with players

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As previously mentioned, players will come into contact with both their opponents and with their own team during the course of a game. **However, contact with the opposition should not be the first option of the player running with the ball.** Although it is necessary to carry the ball forward in order eventually to score, there are other options to be explored before resorting to contact. As well as having relevance to the flow of the game, this is also a point of safety, as it is inevitable that if a player runs very hard at another player regularly enough, injury is highly likely to occur before too long.

Therefore, you should work with players to develop and prioritize their skills in the following order:

1. Evasive skills - avoiding contact
2. Passing skills - moving the ball before contact
3. Managing contact - making contact on the player's own terms, i.e. running at the sides of defenders rather than making contact full on

All coaches should develop the following practices before moving on to contact:

- Developing footwork through games of Touch Rugby or FLAG Rugby with a ball
- Practicing 2 v 1 passing activities
- Developing close quarter evasion skills, 1v 1, with the ball carrier trying to get to an edge on the defender

Nevertheless, eventually contact with another player will occur within a game, and players must be prepared for this. Contact shields and tackle bags carry some benefit in this area in encouraging young players to build their confidence in contact skills. However, these items of equipment can assist the development of poor technique, because they make the practice unrealistic (i.e. a player can charge a tackle shield far harder than at another player) and consequently should be utilized sparingly. When using shields and/or bags, the following should be considered:

- The run up to the equipment - this distance should be kept short (less than 5 meters).
- The shield holder - if an adult, the shield should 'give' a little on impact, otherwise the player will bounce off; if a child, limit the run up distance, allowing only walking. Match sizes of players, and involve other adults if possible.
- Holding the shield - hold in two hands, not with arms through it. Turn sideways, legs apart, and go backwards slightly with impact.
- Holding the bag - ensure holder stands to the side.
- Distance between equipment - ensure an appropriate distance between bags/shields so that players do not collide. Keep players working in the same direction.

When you are confident that your players are ready, you can take the next step and introduce contact directly with another player. Again, safety is paramount, so it is necessary to consider the pace of the activity and the matching of players. You may find that the most confident and enthusiastic players who are prepared for the next step are smaller than the others. It is important, therefore, to think carefully about pairing players up appropriately.

Players should begin to practice the **basic body position**:

### Key factors

- Eyes open, head up, chin off chest
- Rounded shoulders, braced for impact
- Legs apart, in squat position, bent at knee

- Straight back, weight on balls of feet to allow quick reaction
- From this, it is possible to move on to these suggested activities:

### **Bump**

Players walk around in a small grid in low body position, when whistle blows player finds another one and 'bumps' shoulder to shoulder, then continues walking. Progress to jogging as confidence grows.

### **1 v 1 drive**

With one player on one side of a line, and one on the other, both adopt a low driving body position, and place one hand on each of the opponent's shoulders. Each gently drives the other player to cross the line. Progression: meet shoulder to shoulder.

### **Falling triangle**

Three players form a triangle, and a player in the middle pretends to be a 'log' (stands completely solid). The others gently push the player backwards and forwards round the triangle.

## **1.6 Key factors of managing contact**

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### **Ball carrier - standing in the tackle**

- Focus on the contact area (to the side of the defender)
- Keep chin off chest and eyes open
- Maintain a low body position
- Keep the ball in two hands, away from the contact
- Use small steps on the approach to impact
- Use sidestep or footwork to hit onto the side of the defender
- Plant the front foot close to the defender's feet
- Body before the ball
- Contact side-on with hard parts of the body
- 'Jack-up' on contact (drive from low to high)
- Aim to get the shoulder past the defender's shoulder
- Maintain a low stable base - chin up, eyes open
- Hold the ball close in to the body at hip height
- Brace for impact (from defense and support)
- Transfer the ball back after the initial contact and forward movement

### **Ball carrier - on the ground**

- Focus on the contact area
- Keep chin off chest and eyes open
- Maintain a low body position
- Keep the ball in two hands, away from the contact
- Use small steps on the approach to impact
- Use sidestep footwork to hit onto the side of the defender
- Body before the ball
- Contact side-on with hard parts of the body
- Use power steps upon impact to continue the forward movement
- Try to get the shoulder beyond the defender
- Use a strong leg drive forward before going to ground
- Immediately place the ball to the side of the body towards the support players and then release the ball or look to pass the ball to a support runner
- Keep the body at right angles to the touchline
- Regain feet immediately or as quickly as possible

### **Ball carrier - hit and spin**

- Focus on the contact area
- Keep chin off chest and eyes open
- Maintain a low body position
- Keep the ball in two hands, away from the contact
- Use small steps on the approach to impact
- Use sidestep footwork to hit onto the side of the defender
- Use wide power steps upon impact
- Plant the front foot close to the defender's feet
- Body before the ball
- Target the side of the defender's shoulder
- Contact side-on with hard parts of the body
- Spin to the outside of the shoulder contacted, maintaining momentum
- Burst away once facing forward

### **Ball carrier - pop pass in contact**

- Focus on the contact area
- Keep chin off chest and eyes open
- Maintain a low body position
- Keep the ball in two hands, away from the contact
- Use small steps on the approach to impact
- Use sidestep footwork to hit onto the side of the defender
- Use wide power steps upon impact
- Plant the front foot close to the defender's feet
- Body before the ball
- Must get shoulder to the side and beyond the defender's body
- Contact side-on with hard parts of the body
- Maintain a low stable base, with chin up and eyes open
- Turn head to look for support
- Screen the ball with the body
- Pop a short pass to the supporting player running into space
- Support this player immediately

### **First player support - ball off the ground**

- Approach the ball carrier from depth, parallel to the touchline
- Identify role
- Call for the pass if the best option
- If not, assume a low driving position (i.e. lower knees and hips, spine in line, chin off chest, eyes up and sight the target)
- Drive onto the ball carrier
- Drive forward with the legs and wrap arms around the ball carrier
- Maintain the leg drive
- Reposition arms for the ball transfer
- Secure and transfer the ball
- Communicate ownership of the ball

### **First player support - ball on the ground**

- Approach the grounded ball from depth, parallel to the touchline
- Identify role
- Call for the pass if the best option
- If not, assume a low driving position
- Retain the feet and secure position by straddling and going beyond the ball
- Drive forward, binding into the opposition and past the ball or...
- ...Pick up the ball, drive forward and set, or pass

## **1.7 Key factors of the maul**

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A 'maul' occurs when a player carrying the ball is held up by one or more opponents, and one or more of the ball carrier's teammates bind onto the ball carrier. All the players involved are on their feet and moving towards a goal line.

### **Second and third support players**

- Identify role (decide best option)
- Sight the target area
- Approach the ball carrier and the first support player from depth and parallel to the touchline
- Assume a low, effective driving position
- Bind and drive either side of the ball carrier, forming a wedge forward of the ball
- Maintain a strong, forward leg drive throughout, using short steps

### **Additional support players**

- Identify role and decide if it is necessary to join
- If so, sight the target area
- Approach the maul from behind, parallel to the touchline
- Assume a low, effective driving position
- If possible, bind with a team mate and drive into a 'mini maul'
- Ensure that balanced numbers approach either side of the maul
- Bind and drive onto the maul at the hindmost foot
- Maintain a strong, forward leg drive throughout, using short steps
- Transfer the ball to the back of the maul, communicating its position at all times
- Deliver to the half back or initiate further play

## **1.8 Key factors of the ruck**

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A 'ruck' is a phase of play in which one or more players from each team, who are on their feet, in physical contact, close around the ball on the ground.

### **Additional support players**

- Identify role and decide if it is necessary to join
- If so, sight the target area
- Approach the ruck from depth, parallel to the touchline
- Bind with a team mate or onto the opposition
- Drive forward past the ball
- Use the feet to ruck the ball clear of congestion
- Stay on feet at all times

## **1.9 Drills and activities relating to contact and support play**

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The majority of the activities outlined here use a 'game sense' coaching approach. Modified games and activities are set up by you, the coach, but are not actually lead by you. Allow the players to play the games and begin the activities themselves. You should observe what goes on and use tactical questioning to promote an understanding of the actions undertaken.

### **Parameters of the exercises**

- The session should begin at half pace

- Defense should be limited to 'bump and hold' tackles initially, but can be progressed to full contact as the session develops
- Play does not necessarily have to stop due to a mistake - allow play to flow
- During the initial stages, defense cannot gain possession from an attacker's mistake
- You should have a second ball to hand if the first ball is 'stuck' at the contact point
- Exercises should be player centred. Ensure you adopt the 'query theory' - i.e. ask, don't tell

During the drills, you should look closely for:

- Players looking at the defense before receiving the ball
- Players recognizing when to penetrate the defense, and when to outflank
- Support of the ball carrier and the position of the ball carrier in contact
- The backs to play flat off a quick ball, by running late
- Players finding a straight running line before receiving the ball, not afterwards
- Players attacking weaker areas of defense (blind side?)
- Playing the same way – establishing a consistent pattern of play

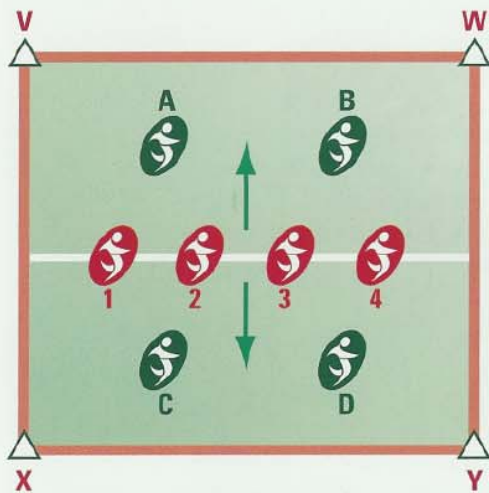
It is important that you get feedback from the players after each exercise, using questions such as:

- What did you see when...?
- How could you...?
- Why did you...?
- What did you...?
- What happened when...?

## Continuous try scoring

No of players: 2 teams of 4    Balls: 1    Markers: 4    Grid: 30m x 20m

**Aim: to practise attacking a disorganised defence**



1. The four attackers attempt to score across try lines V-W or X-Y.
2. Defenders A, B, C and D defend at their respective ends. This creates a 4-on-2 situation in favour of the attack.
3. Attackers 1, 2, 3 and 4 attempt to score as many tries as possible in a given time.
4. The players then swap roles and A, B, C and D attempt to better the target set by 1, 2, 3 and 4.
5. A try is scored in the usual way. If the attackers infringe the Laws of the Game they must cease attacking and develop an attack to the opposite try line. When a try is successfully scored, attackers turn and attack the opposite try line.

6. The team with the most tries at the end wins.

7. For younger players who are new to contact rugby, a tag or touch can be allowed to stop the attack. This can be developed into a full contact tackle as confidence in contact is increased.

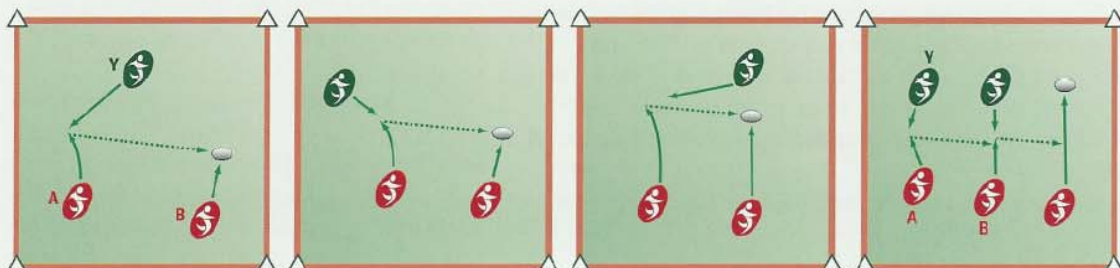
8. Complexity can be developed for the attackers by stipulating that they must employ a switch or loop pass in the build-up to the try.

## Problem solving

No of players: 8+    Balls: 1    Markers: 4    Grid: 15m x 15m

**Aim: to practise creating and holding space against the opposition**

N.B. In all these practices, in the early stage always condition the defence so that the attack can succeed. The diagrams represent example ways of solving the problems, but there are other ways.



**Problem 1:**  
2 v 1, defender in front

**Problem 2:**  
2 v 1, defender from left

**Problem 3:**  
2 v 1, defender from right

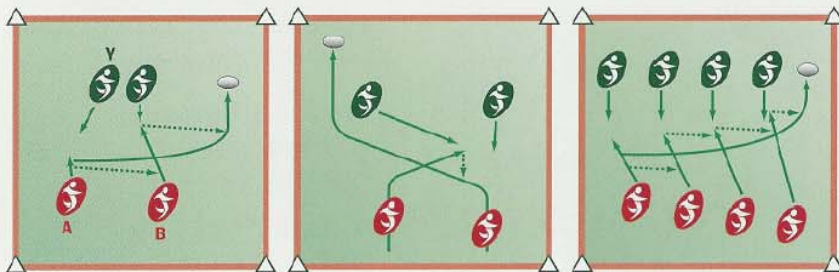
**Problem 4:**  
3 v 2, defenders in front

## Problem solving

No of players: 8+    Balls: 1    Markers: 4    Grid: 15m x 15m

**Aim: to practise creating and holding space against the opposition**

N.B. In all these practices, in the early stage always condition the defence so that the attack can succeed. The diagrams represent example ways of solving the problems, but there are other ways.



**Problem 5:**  
2 v 2, defenders close

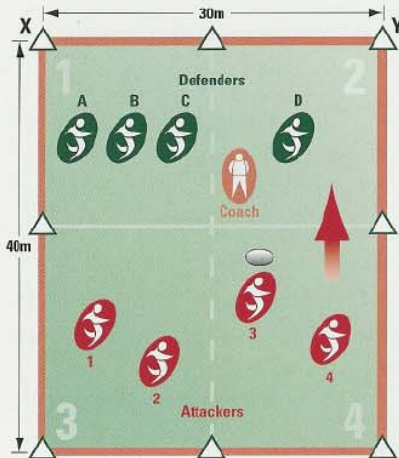
**Problem 6:**  
2 v 2, defenders spread

**Problem 7:**  
4 v 4, defenders in front

## Scanning

No of players: 8+    Balls: 1    Markers: 8    Playing area: 30m x 40m

**Aim: to practise looking at the shape of the opposition defence and attacking accordingly**



1. Defenders A, B and C are positioned in zone 1, and defender D in zone 2. These defenders must stay in their allocated zones - they cannot move into any other zones. Defenders can move into their allocated areas once the attackers' backs are turned.
2. The four attackers are spread evenly across zones 3 and 4, with their backs to the defenders. Attackers 1, 2, 3 and 4 can move into any zone.
3. You, the coach, call "go", the attackers turn, and you throw the ball into the air.
4. The attackers pick up the moving ball and attempt to score across try line X-Y by overloading the defender in zone 2.
5. The attackers try to score as many tries as possible from six attempts. You can **condition** the defence (or change their positioning) after each attempt.

6. The players then swap roles and A, B, C and D attempt to better the target set by 1, 2, 3 and 4.

7. The team with the most tries at the end wins.

8. Complexity can be developed by increasing the number of players, and by allowing one defensive sweeper who can move between zones 1 and 2. The coach can also stand behind the attackers and condition the defence by using hand signals.

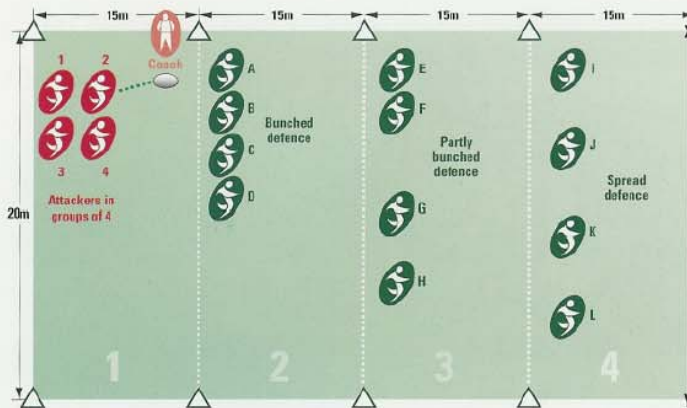
You should look for:

- Players scanning and recognising where the defence is
- Communication between players
- Players making the correct decisions

## Channel running (scanning)

No of players: 16+    Balls: 1    Markers: 10    Channels: 60m x 20m

**Aim: to practise looking at the shape of the opposition defence and attacking accordingly**



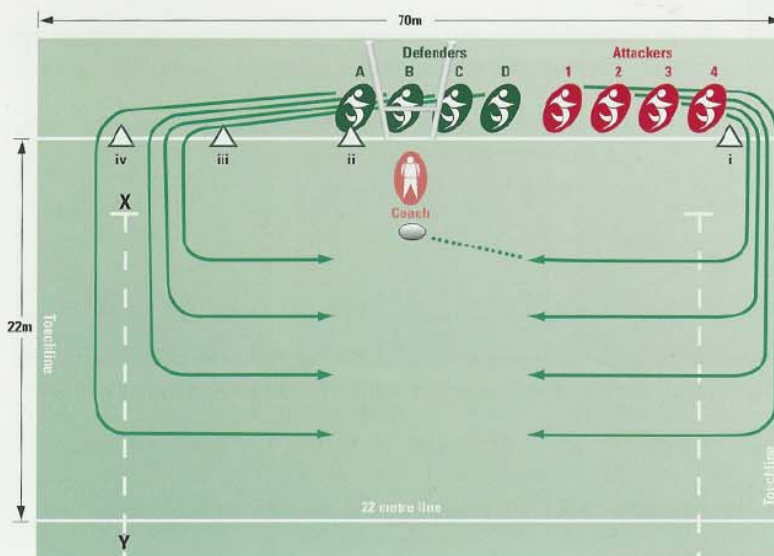
1. Attackers 1, 2, 3 and 4 start in zone 1.
2. Defenders A, B, C and D are positioned in zone 2 and will play as a bunched defence.
3. Defenders E, F, G and H are positioned in zone 3 and will play as a partly bunched defence.
4. Defenders I, J, K and L are positioned in zone 4 and will play as a spread defence.

5. You should throw the ball to attackers 1, 2, 3 and 4, who move forward to attack each defence line in zones 2, 3 and 4, eventually attempting to score across try line X-Y.
6. Defenders must stay in formation (either bunched, partly bunched or spread) and can only move within their allocated zone.
7. You should not give the players any further information. Through questioning, you must ask the players to explain what they saw, why they made the choices they did, and how they could improve their execution of the drill.
8. Complexity can be developed by increasing the number of players, by reconditioning the defences, and by allowing the defences to move forward out of their allocated zones.

You should look for:

- Players scanning
- Support players getting into the correct positions
- Communication between players
- The ball carrier making the correct decision

## Attacking space



No of players: 8+  
Balls: 1  
Markers: 4  
Playing area: <70m x 22m

**Aim: to practise looking at the shape of the opposition defence and attacking accordingly**

1. Attackers 1, 2, 3 and 4 stand in a group behind marker i.
2. Defenders A, B, C and D stand in a group behind marker ii.

3. Attackers 1, 2, 3 and 4 must run onto the pitch going around marker i first, whereupon you should throw the ball to the attackers.
4. Upon your call of "go", defenders B, C and D should run around marker iii into play, and defender A should run around marker iv into play.
5. The attackers should then attack the defence, and keep going until they score across try line X-Y (5 metre line).
6. Complexity can be developed by increasing the number of attackers and defenders, by changing the number of defenders going around each marker, by conditioning defenders to remain in pre-determined zones, and by adding a defensive sweeper.

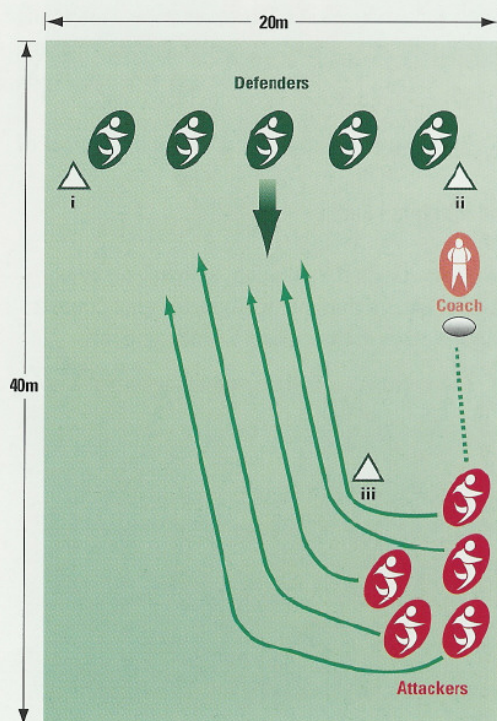
You should look out for:

- Attackers communicating what they see the defenders doing
- Attackers 'fixing' the inside defenders.
- Attackers running in straight lines before receiving the ball
- Attackers maintaining possession
- Attackers committing defenders and therefore attacking space

## Attacking a spread defence

No of players: 9+    Balls: 1    Markers: 3    Playing area: 20m x 40m

**Aim: to practise making the correct decisions in contact against a spread defence**



1. You should set a flat line defence (minimum of five players) behind markers i and ii.
2. 4+ attackers should be bunched around marker iii.
3. You should throw the ball to the attackers, upon which the defenders can move forward of markers i and ii to begin their defending. The defence should attempt to remain spread throughout play if at all possible.
4. The ball carrier must go into contact with the defenders, with the attacking support players providing options once contact is made. Ensure that the defenders do not contest for the ball.
5. Play should continue until the attackers manage to break through the spread defence.
6. Complexity can be developed by increasing the number of attackers and/or defenders, by allowing the defence to commit a maximum of two players to the tackle, and by allowing the defence to compete for the ball.

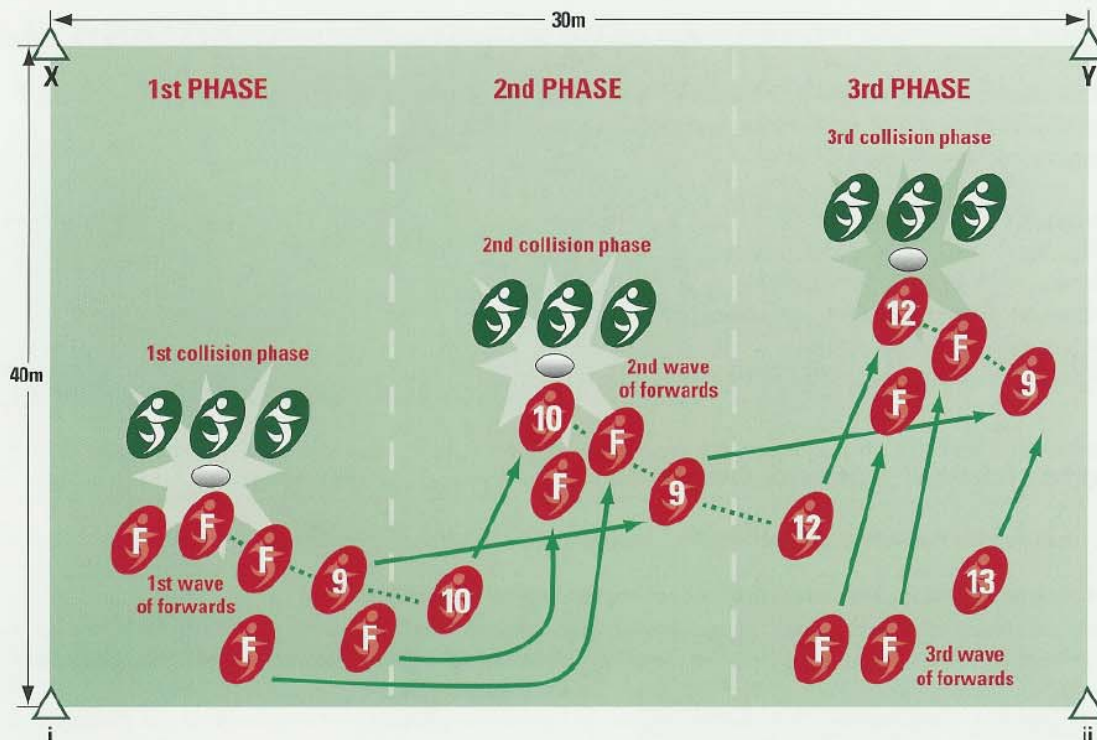
You should look out for:

- The correct technique of the ball carrier in contact
- Support players providing options and aggressive support to the ball carrier (e.g. the 'magic triangle')
- Communication amongst the attackers of where space is

## Establishing waves of support (to create quick ball and mismatches in the defence)

No of players: 16+    Balls: 1    Markers: 2    Playing area: 30m x 40m

**Aim: to practise establishing waves of support and correct support lines**

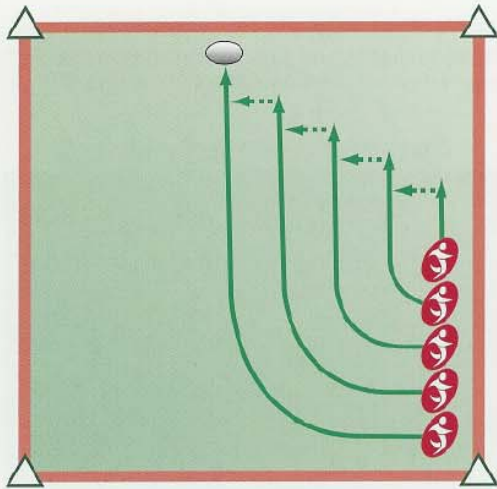


1. You should set a partly bunched defence (minimum of eight players) behind the try line X-Y.
2. A minimum of eight attackers should position themselves behind markers i and ii.
3. The ball must start with a forward, who should take the ball into contact with the defence, who have moved well beyond the try line in anticipation of contact with the attackers. Ensure that the defenders do not contest for the ball. (Usually it is good practice not to use more than four attackers in the collision zone - support players should position themselves behind the backs).
4. The ball carrier should be supported by fellow forwards, who should secure quick ball to No. 9, who must then clear to the backline.
5. The backs should pass to a forward, who then takes the ball into contact. They are supported by the second wave of forwards.
6. Play should continue in waves until the attacking side scores over try line X-Y.
7. Complexity can be developed by increasing the number of players, by the ball beginning with the backs rather than the forwards, and by allowing the defence to compete for the ball.

You should look out for:

- Players being vigorous at the breakdown
- Support players only committing to the breakdown if required
- If not required at the breakdown, support players should reposition themselves in readiness for the next phase
- Ball carriers looking to offload before, in, or after contact (if possible)

## Running from depth



No of players: 5  
Balls: 1 per group  
Markers: 4  
Grid: 10m x 10m

**Aim: to practise running from depth on to a straight line before releasing a flat pass**

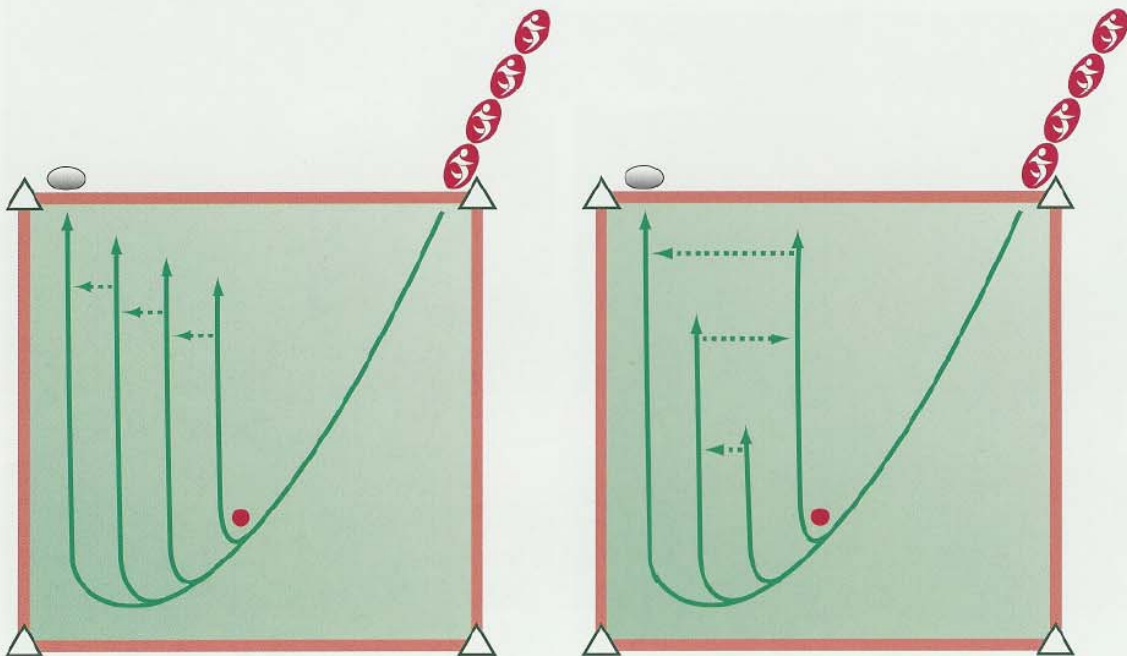
Five players line up behind one another, the front player holding the ball. On that player's command, all other players fan out to the side to get in position to receive a flat pass. The support players must get on to a straight line before receiving the ball. The last player scores over the try line. The practice should be performed passing to both the left and right.

No of players: 4/5    Balls: 1 per group    Markers: 5    Grid: 10m x 10m

**Aim: to practise running from depth on to a straight line before releasing a flat pass**

The first player carries the ball around a marker, followed by the rest of the group. Once round the marker, the player passes the ball on and then a third pass is made. That player then scores over the try line. Either of the above patterns can be adopted.

To extend either of these exercises, time groups against each other - the fastest group wins.



### Committing a defender

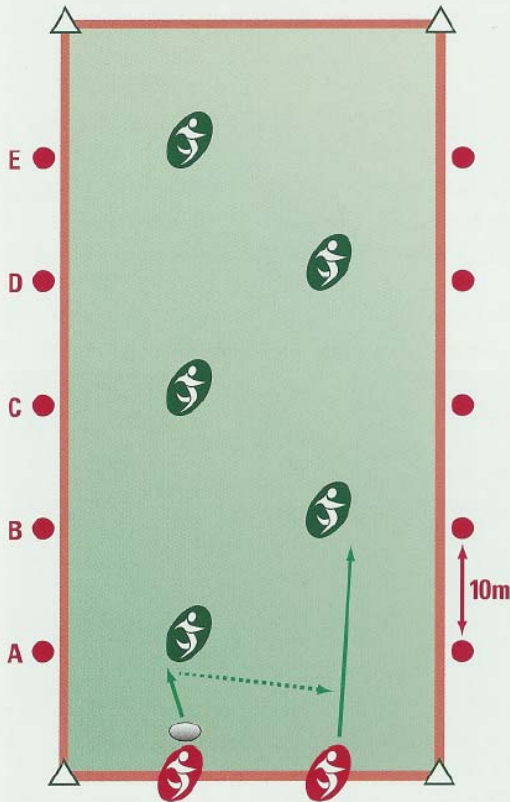
All players need to be coached in their responsibility as ball carriers in attack to keep the full attention and commitment of a single defender and to then provide a sufficiently well timed lateral pass so that an unmarked teammate running in support can continue the attack or score a try.

Key factors	Coaching notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ball carrier angles the run towards the inside shoulder of the defender – this creates or maintains space for the next receiver</li> <li>• Pass to the support runner as soon as the defender is drawn away from the attacking space by committing to the ball carrier</li> <li>• Support runner maintains depth and width behind the ball carrier and accelerates onto the pass</li> <li>• If the defender does not move to meet the ball carrier, he/she should continue the run into the space available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good communication between the ball carrier and his support is essential</li> <li>• Ball carrier needs to look towards his support just before passing</li> <li>• Timing of the pass is crucial – too early will allow defender time to move across, too late will give time for the tackle</li> <li>• Some young players find a moving defender difficult to cope with at first and accordingly you may wish to introduce this technique initially with a static defender</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Common errors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ball carrier slows down too much on approaching defender and the support player over runs or the pass goes forward</li> <li>• No communication between ball carrier and support player results in pass going astray</li> <li>• Ball carrier runs to outside shoulder of defender and encroaches on the support player’s space</li> </ul>

## Beating a single defender

No of players: Pairs    Balls: 1 per pair    Markers: 10    Channels: 10m x 60m

**Aim: to practise the skills just learned by fixing a defender to create or maintain an effective attacking space**



The players run down the grid in pairs using their 2 v 1 skills to defeat the sole defender between the markers.

Like many practices, as coach you should use the opportunity to develop the difficulty for the attackers. To gradually increase difficulty you can:

1. Begin with defenders at B and D. Then develop to defenders at A, C and E, and eventually to defenders at A, B, C, D and E as in the diagram. Each marker should be about 10m apart.
2. The defenders move sideways only and may not advance or retreat up and down the channel.
3. Once beaten, the defender should concentrate on the next pair of advancing attackers.
4. In the early stages while players are still learning their contact skills, you can allow the defender to tag or touch the attacker. When the defenders start to dominate the exercise, progress them through to a full contact tackle.

## 2. TACKLING

A tackle occurs when, simultaneously, a ball carrier is held by one or more opponents and is brought to the ground or the ball touches the ground. That player is known as the tackled player. Any opponents of the tackled player who also go to ground are known as tacklers.

### **2.1 Safety in tackling**

---

The safety of players is an obvious and necessary central factor when coaching tackling. All players should learn tackling through the progressions detailed on page 27. In order to develop confident and effective defenders, these tackling progressions should be practiced on a regular basis, a little and often. Additionally, these are aspects of your coaching strategy that you should consider:

- Match players by size and shape. Remember, the small, quick and elusive players are just as difficult to tackle as the big ones
- Adjust the pace of the activity to build the complexity - walk, jog, run
- Adjust the size of the grid - additional width will make it easier for the ball carrier
- Teach the tackles in order - the side tackle is usually found to be the easiest
- Keep an eye on ground conditions - players will build confidence more effectively on soft ground
- If you find that boots make it difficult for players, practice without them, if conditions are appropriate
- Practice on both sides - left and right

### **2.2 Keeping play moving**

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Before moving on to the tackling progressions, it is important to consider the player being tackled - the ball carrier. As previously discussed, the ball carrier should recognize that contact is about to occur and take the tackle on their own terms. The ball carrier should attempt to pass the ball in the tackle to a support player so as to keep play going forward. This is known as the offload. If this is not possible, they should take the ball to ground and either pass immediately from the ground to a teammate, or present the ball for a teammate to pick it up. When presenting the ball, the ball carrier should make an effort to place the ball in a convenient place for support players. To do this, the player should make contact with the ground first and then make a second movement to place the ball. To this end, encourage your players to control the ball in contact, keeping it close to the body and in two hands whenever possible.

## 2.3 Key factors of tackling

### Side tackle

Key factors – the tackler	Key factors – the ball carrier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imagine a target on the bottom of the ball carrier's shorts</li> <li>• Head up, chin off chest</li> <li>• Brace shoulders</li> <li>• Make initial contact with shoulders first on ball carrier's thigh</li> <li>• Wrap arms around the ball carrier's legs</li> <li>• Keep eyes open and head up behind the ball carrier's legs</li> <li>• Drive with legs, gripping with arms and hands, and bring the player to ground</li> <li>• After the tackle, get to your feet and contest for the ball</li> </ul>	Assuming tackle from left: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go with impact of tackle</li> <li>• Turn outside hip (right hip) and land with body braced, on rounded right shoulder</li> <li>• Present the ball</li> </ul>

### Rear tackle

Key factors – the tackler	Key factors – the ball carrier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imagine a target on the bottom of the ball carrier's shorts</li> <li>• Head up, chin off chest</li> <li>• Brace shoulders</li> <li>• Make initial contact with shoulders first on ball carrier's thigh (cheek to cheek)</li> <li>• Wrap arms around the ball carrier's legs</li> <li>• Keep eyes open and head up to one side the ball carrier's legs</li> <li>• Drive with legs, gripping with arms and hands, and bring the player to ground</li> <li>• Land on top of the tackled player</li> <li>• After the tackle, get to your feet and contest for the ball</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go with impact of tackle</li> <li>• Turn away from tackler's head and land with body braced, on rounded shoulder</li> <li>• Present the ball</li> </ul>

### Front tackle (passive)

Key factors – the tackler	Key factors – the ball carrier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Imagine a target on the bottom of the ball carrier's shorts</li><li>• Brace shoulders</li><li>• Head up, chin off chest</li><li>• Make initial contact with shoulders first on ball carrier's thigh</li><li>• Wrap arms around the ball carrier's legs</li><li>• Keep eyes open and head up to one side the ball carrier's legs</li><li>• Use momentum to take the ball carrier over the shoulder</li><li>• Twist around and land on top of the tackled player</li><li>• After the tackle, get to your feet and contest for the ball</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try to make contact with the side (arms) of the defender</li><li>• Go with impact of tackle</li><li>• Turn away from tackler's head and land with body braced, on rounded shoulder</li><li>• Present the ball</li></ul>

**Front tackle (active – drive the ball carrier behind the advantage line)**

It is advisable to practice this tackle only with older players and to have a soft landing mat available.

Key factors – the tackler	Key factors – the ball carrier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get lead foot as close to the ball carrier as possible</li> <li>• Keep eyes on point of impact</li> <li>• Keep head to the side</li> <li>• Drops hips to lower the centre of gravity</li> <li>• Drive shoulder up into the centre of the target area (stomach/chest)</li> <li>• Power should come from an explosive drive upwards through legs and seat</li> <li>• Keep back straight</li> <li>• If tackling with the right shoulder, the right arm should wrap the ball carrier.</li> <li>• If possible, use the left arm to pick up the attacker’s right leg</li> <li>• Drive upwards and then back, aiming to finish on top</li> <li>• Roll away, get to feet, contest possession</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go with impact of tackle</li> <li>• Turn away from tackler’s head and land with body braced, on rounded shoulder</li> <li>• Present the ball</li> </ul>

**Smother tackle**

There are different definitions as to the nature of this tackle, but essentially it attempts to wrap the ball carrier up, thus preventing a pass or release. This should be taught to players who are already comfortable in tackling.

Key factors – the tackler	Key factors – the ball carrier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get lead foot as close to the ball carrier as possible</li> <li>• Keep eyes on point of impact</li> <li>• Wrap arms around the upper part of the ball carrier’s body</li> <li>• Try to trap the ball and the player’s arms</li> <li>• Add own weight to the ball carrier to bring the player to ground</li> <li>• Aim to land on top of the ball carrier</li> <li>• Roll away, contest for possession</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go with impact of tackle</li> </ul>

The key factors for all of the tackles detailed represent each tackle in a pure form. Additional key points may be added or emphasized as progression is made. However, as the game is a dynamic activity undertaken by players of all shapes and sizes moving in different directions, it is important that sufficient tackling experience is built up so that an effective tackle can be manufactured from the basic technique during a match.

As in other contact sports, such as judo, defenders may achieve a basic understanding by 'mixing and matching' techniques to fit the circumstance. You should consider the following scenarios:

- An open-side flanker is moving across the field from right to left. An attacking player sidesteps back inside the defender on the flanker's right shoulder. Should the flanker's tackle be made by from the side, the front (passive) or should he/she make a smother tackle?
- A full back is moving across to make a try-saving tackle. The ball carrier is only one meter from the line. A side or smother tackle will result in a try. The only way to stop a try is to drive the attacker 90 degrees sideways into touch. What would be the most effective tackle to do this?

## **2.4 The tackling progressions**

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A carefully structured teaching progression is outlined below to help you to introduce tackling to young players. The progression has eight clear stages. The time taken between or on each stage will depend entirely upon the age and ability of the players involved. Here are some examples of the progressions in action:

- Teaching an U8 team to tackle prior to the U9 season, in each session ten minutes was spent on tackling and up to three weeks was spent on each stage, with the whole progression taking three months.
- An U10 squad was reintroduced to the full progression once a month during the full season, beginning each time at stage two.
- An U12 winger and fly half were having problems with their tackling. The coach of the team spent ten minutes at the beginning of each session with the players working through the progressions over a one month period.

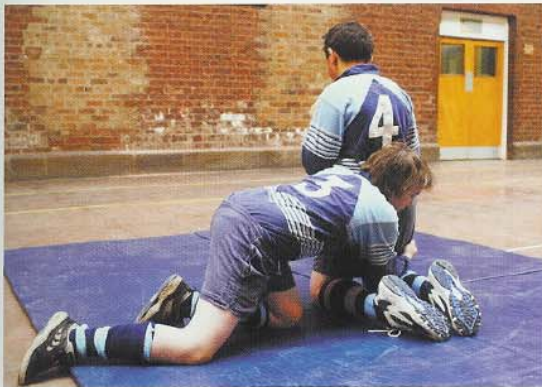
When teaching the activities within the progressions, remember:

- Watch each player practice on both shoulders
- Coach both tackler and ball carrier
- The ball carrier should have a ball and an aim (e.g. to score a try)
- Don't spend a long time doing the activity as players will lose concentration
- Don't get players wet at the beginning of a session, this will affect concentration. Always remember weather conditions when using static activities

### **The progressive stages for introducing the tackle**

By practicing one versus one in a controlled manner, players will develop confidence. Organize the practice so players have plenty of space and are working in the same direction to avoid collisions with unseen players.

The progressions can be used for each type of tackle. When coaching the tackle from the front, ensure that the tackler, when kneeling, is at a slight angle, so that a finish on top of the player is possible and not a fall back on to the player's own legs.



1) Ball carrier kneeling, tackler kneeling



2) Ball carrier standing, tackler kneeling



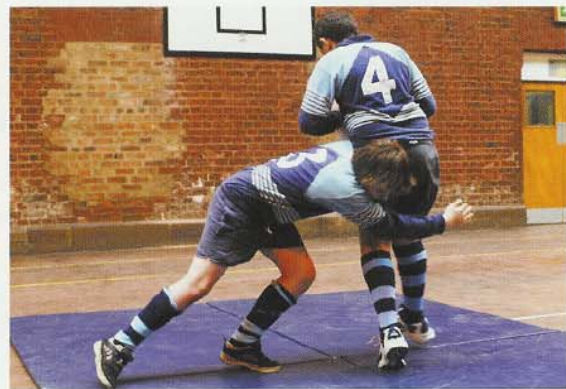
3) Ball carrier standing, tackler squatting



4) Ball carrier walking, tackler squatting



5) Ball carrier walking, tackler walking



6) Ball carrier jogging, tackler walking



7) Ball carrier jogging, tackler jogging



8) Ball carrier running, tackler running

## 3. TEAM DEFENSE

### 3.1 Different styles of defense

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Teams defend in different ways. Some teams allow the opposition to attack - comfortable in their defensive capabilities, players do not rush up, simply waiting for an opportunity or a mistake. Some are more aggressive, attempting to attack the opposition by denying them time and space - defenders 'blitz' the attackers. Others mix between these two styles, depending upon factors such as field position and weather conditions. In terms of systems, younger teams tend to play a man-to-man defense throughout, whilst experienced sides may adopt more complicated defenses from set pieces or breakdowns.

The underlying defensive theme in any team, however, is to stop the attacking side from scoring a try. To do this, all individuals must be competent defenders and, whatever defensive system is used, tackles must be made in front of the gain line. Teams must concentrate on:

Shape

- Organization
- Communication

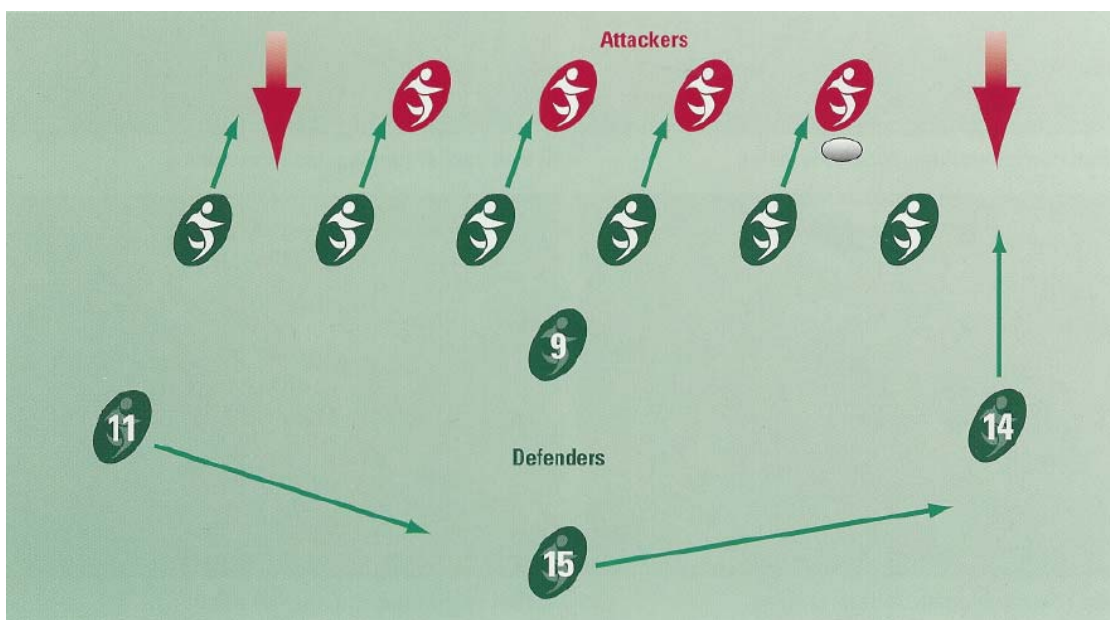
### 3.2 Shape

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If a team adopts a defensive flat line in open play, there will always be space behind them. To counter this open space, the defending team will often drop some players behind the flat line. In the example shown, four of the backs have dropped deeper in order to cover:

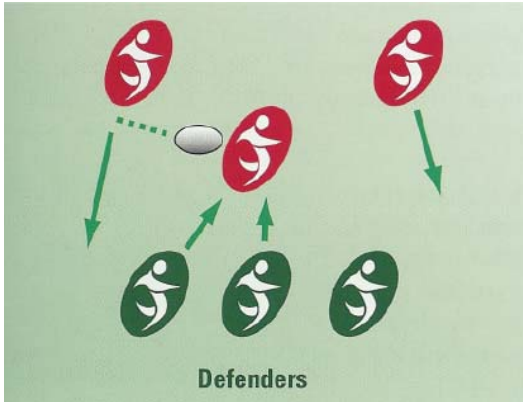
- the short kick through or over the defense (scrum half)
- the spaces out wide on either side of the pitch (wingers)
- and the space deep behind the defensive line (full back)

If the ball was moved towards one of the ends of the defensive line, the players would readjust with a winger stepping up to become the final defender at the end of the line.

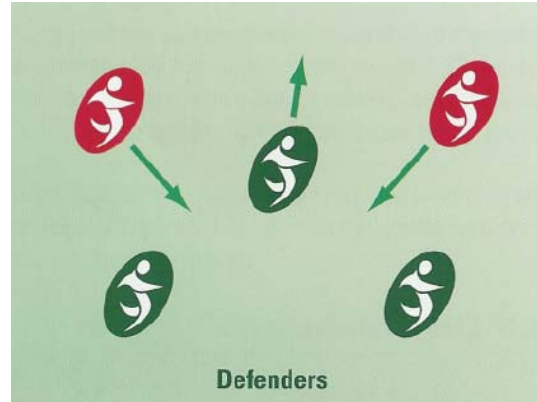


### Defensive line

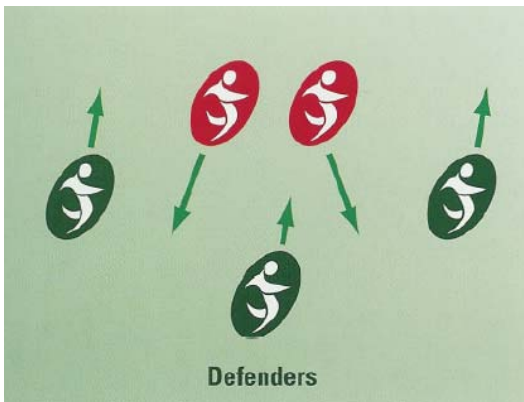
Maintaining the shape of the defense is therefore critical, as the ten or so players in the line can easily become isolated if the shape is compromised. The shape of the defense can be weakened by:



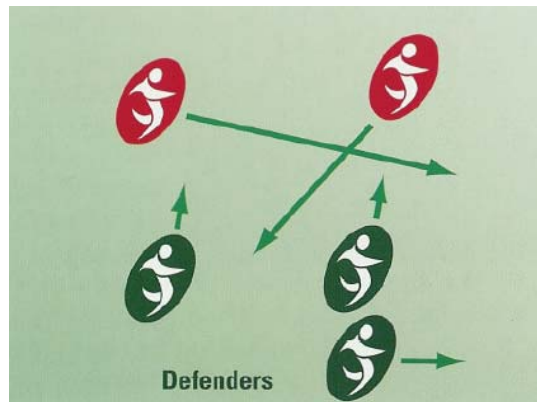
The line being too short. Defenders may become bunched together or commit too many players to a particular situation.



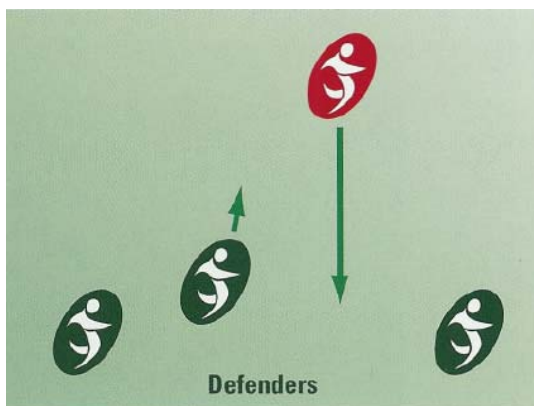
An individual stepping out of the line. Any player moving up too quickly will leave a gap in the line and isolate the players next to him/her.



An individual moving up slower than the rest of the line. This situation is similar to a player moving up too quickly, resulting in a gap being left in the line.



An individual moving out of position behind the line. Any change of direction in play by the attacking side will exploit the space left in the line.



The line becomes too long. This can leave players isolated due to large gaps between defenders.

These simple diagrams, showing three individuals working together, clearly demonstrate the internal workings of the defensive line. If the ball carrier is marked by the middle player, the players on either side can concentrate on supporting runners. Maintaining the shape of the line allows confidence to be gained, as individuals are working together not in isolation. The defenders either side of the first defender (lead defender) should always be slightly behind.

## Depth

The defensive line must be solid in the face of attack, but it must also have depth. A kick through or over will cause problems to a single line. Equally, even if tackles are strong, an attacker who isolates a single defender and offloads in the tackle will put the ball behind the defensive line. Consequently, defenders playing deeper than the defensive line can deal with potential problems and allow the line to reorganize.

The players identified for this deep role are normally the back three, i.e. the two wingers and the full back. Potentially, however, there is space in front of them, so other players may cover immediately behind the line. This may be a team decision, putting strong cover defenders into these safety positions, but many use the scrum half (as per the example shown in 'SHAPE' on page 28).

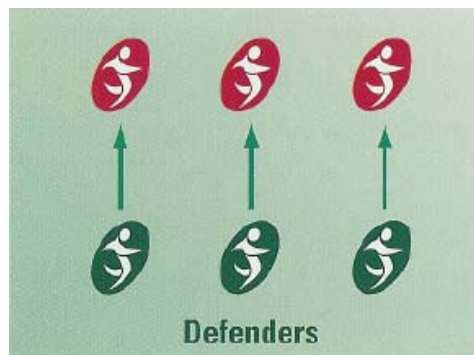
The defensive line can be utilized when chasing kicks (open play or long drop outs). In both cases, there are many different systems in operation, but essentially the underlying principles of formation are the same.

## 3.3 Organization

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### 1) Types of defense

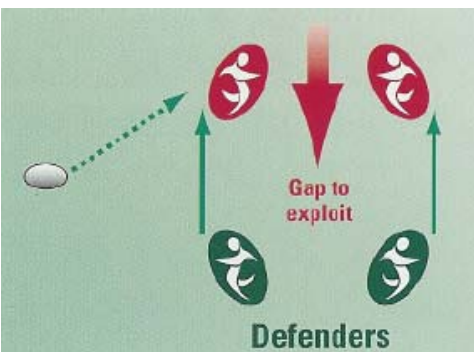
When discussing team defense, it is essential that all players understand their role within the defensive line. There are a number of different types of defense, as follows:



#### **Man-to-man defense**

Put simply, one player from the defending team stands opposite one player from the attacking team. It is the responsibility of the defender to tackle the player immediately in front, if they become the ball carrier.

The defending team should attempt to have numbers equal to the attack in all situations. However, there are organizational issues impacting this, including:

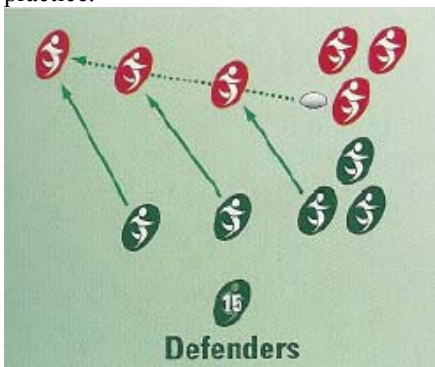


The defending team should all be attempting to do the same thing. Therefore, a team should be aware of which side of the attacker to aim for – inside (i.e. where the pass is coming from) or outside shoulder. Defenders should line up slightly to one side of the attacker meaning that the tackle is easier and making it less likely that a sidestep will be successful. Defending inside the attacker allows a defender to drive an opponent across the field, whilst defending on the outside potentially forces players back inside. As shown in the example, players in the defensive line aiming for different shoulders can leave a gap, which good attackers will exploit.

- **An attacker attempting to run between two players**

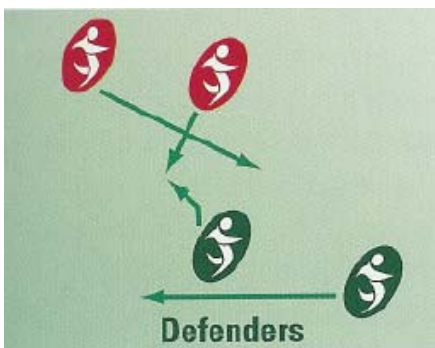
If the ball carrier looks to commit two players by running directly between them, there are three options available to the defenders. Firstly, the outside defender can step in and make the tackle (e.g. wingers can be called upon to tackle an attacking full back who is running outside the defending outside centre). Secondly, the inside player can be the main defender. Thirdly, both defenders can attempt to make the tackle. If this is attempted, one defender must go low and tackle the legs, the other must go higher and attempt to smother the attacker's body, arms and the ball. Which player should go lower and which one

higher can be seen as a team or a situational decision. In either case, it requires thought, discussion and practice.



### 'Drift' ('slide') defense

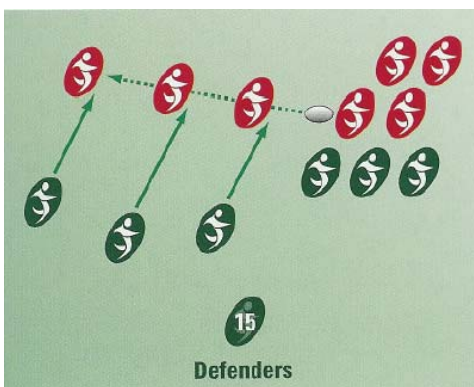
This form of defense allows players to 'drift' to mark another attacking player as the ball is moved across the pitch. The underpinning concept of the drift defense is that the inside (i.e. where the ball is coming from) is an area of strength (more players positioned there), and the outside is an area of weakness (less players positioned there). Defenders must push forward and across the field to enable the defensive line to cover weaker outlying areas.



The drift defense relies on:

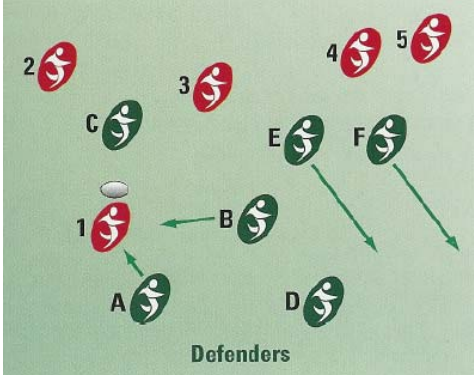
- Players defending from inside to out
- Outside players are confident that inside players are in position to tackle (communication is necessary from the inside)
- Any movement is firstly from the inside
- Slower players are on the inside, quicker players on the outside
- Players move quickly forward and across the field

This form of defense becomes weakened, however, if players who are required to be in the defensive line begin to cover across behind. The defender making the tackle would be isolated in this case, as there would be no security provided on the inside. The team would become vulnerable to a switch in play through a pass, ploy or sidestep.



### 'Banana' ('umbrella') defense

Whichever name is adopted for this type of defense, the concept is the same. The idea is to force the attacking side back towards areas of defensive strength. The end of the line should move first and quickly to compress space in the wider areas (outside). Defenders then attempt, by aiming at the outside shoulders of attacking players, to drive play back towards the point of concentration (set piece or breakdown). This type of defense can be very successful, but a quick thinking attack will spot its potential weaknesses, as there is space both behind and wide.



### 'Scramble' defense

If the opposition does penetrate or overlap the defensive line, it is the duty of all players to get back and make tackles. By organizing themselves correctly and working together, it is possible for a side to deploy a 'scramble' defense to deny the attacking team space and therefore the opportunity to score. In the following example of a break out wide, the tackle for defender A can be made easier for him/her by defender B narrowing the potential space available to the ball carrier (1). Defender C should deny the ball carrier support by positioning him/herself between the ball carrier and attackers 2 and 3. Meanwhile, defender D should protect the tackler (A) on the inside, whilst defenders E and F must prepare for a potential next attack from players 4 and 5.

**N.B. This is very difficult to practice. Using opposed training activities will help players understand the concept.**

## 2) Defense at set pieces

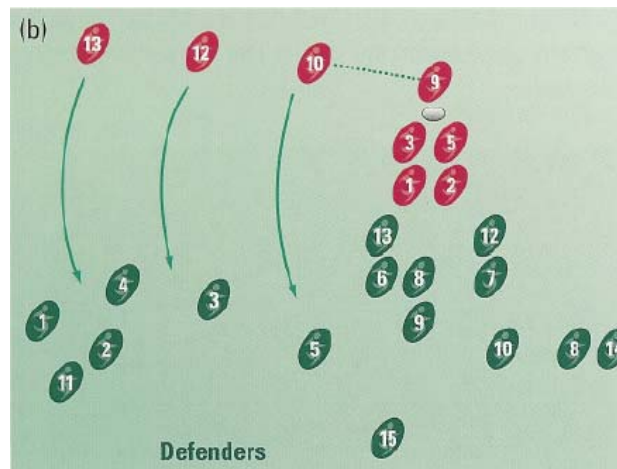
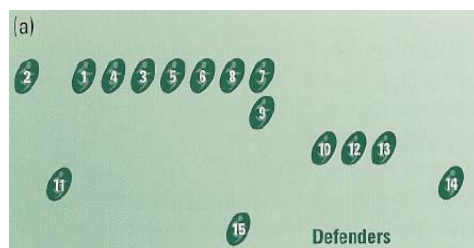
Consideration should be given to:

- Application of pressure at the set piece
- Set pieces on the left and the right of the field
- Close, middle or wider attacks
- Positional roles at the set piece, including:
  - The type of defense adopted by the backs, giving special consideration to the positioning of the back three in order to defend a kick
  - Type of short side defense adopted (should the back row move/peel?)

Team strategies will be formed in these areas depending upon individual personnel and team strengths or even weaknesses.

Following the break up of a set piece, it is clear to the attack where the slower players within the defending team are positioned. Defenses should readjust when forming the defensive line to ensure that slower players are in the middle or close to the ball and quicker players are in wider positions. This is particularly pertinent at the lineout.

In the following example, a defensive organization at the lineout (a) leads to a breakdown in midfield, and a subsequent attack made against the slower defending players moving away from the original set piece (b).



## 3) Defense at the tackle

Following the tackle, the next arriving players should be prepared to:

- Tackle the next attacker if the ball has been passed or offloaded
- Compete for the ball on the ground
- Disrupt the speed and quality of the attacking team's possession (within the laws of the game)
- Take up defensive roles, preparing for the next attack

## 4) Defense at the ruck or maul

Following the formation of a ruck or maul, players who are arriving later have specific roles to play around the breakdown. The level of organization that occurs in these situations will depend upon the playing standard of the game, the ability of the players and the consequent speed of the recycling process.

The underlying principles are as follows:

- Slower, bigger players should defend close to the breakdown
- Quicker players should defend wider
- The team must work hard to readjust and form a defensive shape

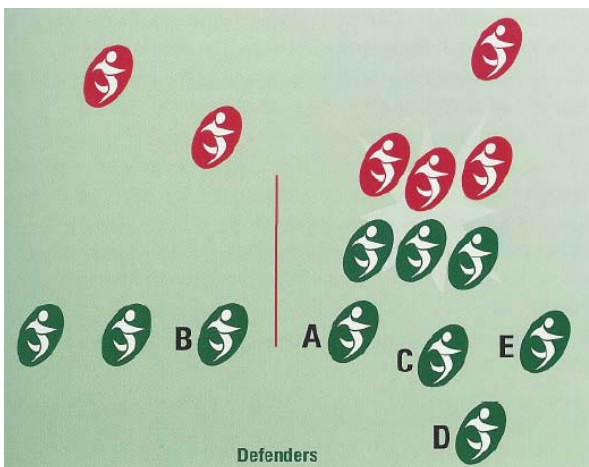
- The defenders must look up at the attack to see what is happening
- Defenders must not give away a penalty by being offside
- The defensive line must try to be organized before the attack emerges with the ball
- The defending team must commit fewer players to the breakdown than the attacking side
- Equalizing numbers on either side of the breakdown will reduce the chances of an overlap being created
- The defense must have a system of covering the inside shoulder of the first player in the defensive line, i.e. the space between the line and the breakdown (see the example below)

### **Player A - the guard (left)**

This player covers the space next to the breakdown (inside the red imaginary line), but they should not be considered as part of the defensive line. The guard's role is to tackle any player attacking close to the breakdown. Alternatively, if the ball is passed wider, they should move up covering the inside shoulder of player B and tackling any player coming back towards the original breakdown. The higher the standard of play, the more complicated this process becomes due to additional players (known as 'bodyguards') being used to ensure security in this vulnerable area. A bodyguard would be positioned between players A and B.

### **Player B- the lead defender**

This is the first player in the defensive line and should work closely with the left guard to ensure attacking players close to the breakdown are tackled.



### **Players C and D - behind the breakdown**

There is potential for the attacking team to drive through the middle, in which case the defensive side should employ a forward defender (in the 'boot') to intercept such a play (player C). In addition, there is an organizational role to be fulfilled, ensuring that the defensive team has players on both sides of the breakdown. This role is often given to the scrum half (player D), who must communicate these instructions quickly and effectively to his/her teammates. Consequently, there may be two players defending behind the breakdown.

### **Player E-the guard (right)**

This player has exactly the same role as the other guard. When play moves on to the left, this guard would join the defensive line by moving forward and across to the left.

**N.B. There are several alternatives to this simple pattern.**

## **3.4 Communication**

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Due to the fact that defensive situations are forever changing, communication between players should be almost constant to enable them to readjust their lines. Such communication can bring confidence and self-belief, which in turn, should improve a side's defensive work.

### **1) Communication at the set piece**

At the set piece, the defense should be clearly aware of the following issues:

- Which defensive pattern is going to be used
- Which player is going to be responsible for which attacking player
- What are the attacking possibilities?

Communication should take place at two levels:

- **Team calls** - key individuals determine organization (e.g. drifting from a lineout)
- **Relationships**- individuals communicate to others what their responsibilities are (e.g. open-side and fly half)

## 2) Communication in general play

In general play, when there is a lot of movement and action, the full back and two wings can have a specific responsibility in the organization of the defensive line.

- **The full back**

The full back has a wider view of the pitch and can, therefore, potentially see the attacking threats and also where the defense is at its weakest. He/she should be aware enough to organize players (probably the wings) to cover spaces on either side of the field in case of a kick. Consequently, the full back should be communicating constantly with the rest of the team.

- **The wings**

Both wingers are ideally placed to assist the team in determining the length of the defensive line. They should 'pull' other players across to form a longer line if it is too short, leaving space out wide. The defensive organization of the short side is another area that a winger should be responsible for. At higher levels of the game, where touch judges are available, the wings should also ensure that the team stays onside when in defense, i.e. at the back foot or ten meters back.

## 3) Communication at the breakdown

In addition to the organizational communication provided by the full back and the wings, the scrum half can provide instructions to the defense positioned around the breakdown. This is a hugely important role, which requires a calm understanding of what is taking place.

## 4) Communication at the defensive line

A joint command or call to urge the line to organize itself and go forward will assist the defending team. Following the formation of the line, there should be head and eye movement to ensure that players are in the right position in relation to the defensive line and to the opposition. Furthermore, the line must ensure that it forms itself onside.

Communication with the referee can help here.

Many teams have developed a call to bring the line forward, which can be quite intimidating for the attacking side. The call, normally instigated by inside players, can be as simple as "In" as the ball comes out, or more complicated in order to assist players through the sequence of events. For example, "Feet" (look to one side and the other), "Feet" (look to the front), and "Press" (ball comes out) can be used to draw the defense forward.

## 4. THE SCRUM

The scrum is an integral part of the game. It provides an opportunity to bring a group of eight players from each team to one point on the pitch to engage in physical contact, thus creating space elsewhere. Nevertheless, it is always necessary to ensure safety at all times when coaching this element of the game. N.B. Further information is also available in Rugby Canada's publication entitled *Building a Safe Technique at the Scrum*.

### 4.1 Building a scrum

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#### Basic scrummaging shape

- Head up - chin off chest, look through eyebrows
- Eyes focused on the target area (do not look away under any circumstances)
- Feet, hips and shoulders all square
- Bend at the knees and the hips with the weight on the balls of the feet - feet should be parallel to the touchline
- Tummy and chest pushed out, back straight
- Shoulders above hips at all times

#### Players must have a positive attitude towards scrummaging.

Practice scrummaging one v one, encourage players to get comfortable, and let players experience flexibility and stability by moving around. For example, a good practice is to ask the players to scrummage together and move them round in a circle, keeping their feet apart so that they have a stable base at all times. Practice lowering so that their knees touch the ground without the shoulders dropping below the hips. Practice scrummaging three v three, five v five and eventually eight person scrums, but do not progress until the players are confident about the previous step

#### Coaches must ensure that players are wearing the correct footwear.

## 4.2 The front row

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### Forming a front row

- The hooker should stand just off the mark, bent at the knees and hips (with weight on the balls of the feet)
- The loosehead prop should approach the hooker from the rear, and should reach behind the hooker and bind on the hip area at the top of the shorts
- The tighthead prop should also approach the hooker from behind and bind on the hip area at the top of the shorts, in a position that allows for their shoulders to remain square
- Grip to be full hand, tight and comfortable
- Keep shoulders, feet and hips square
- Always keep the spine in line with touchline
- Feet should be parallel

**Note: As you become more comfortable, the hooker may have his feet slightly forward of his props**

Practice scrum engagement initially with only front rows, following the same sequence of events as for an eight-man scrum. Heads go to the left of the opposition player.

Prior to engagement the front row must focus on the target area where their heads and shoulders will make contact with their opponents.

**The referee should manage the engagement sequence.**

**As from January 1, 2007 the IRB has directed all referees to form all scrums (irrespective of the age of the players) with a four-phase sequence:**

### **Crouch - Touch - Pause - Engage.**

Please refer to Rugby Canada's publication *Building a Safe Technique at the Scrum* and the IRB instructional Video/CD produced at the time of this Law modification (to be released late December 2006).

### Role of props

- To provide a push
- To transmit power
- To provide stability
- To bind together with hooker
- To support the hooker

### Role of the hooker

- To strike for the ball
- To bind together with the props
- To help keep the front row stable

## 4.3 The throw in

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The scrum half must throw in the ball to the scrum without delay after the front rows have engaged. The ball is held in two hands at a slight angle (pointing towards the hooker of the team throwing the ball in) so that when the ball touches the ground inside the tunnel, the hooker can strike it with the broad side of the foot. The hooker can strike when the ball leaves the scrum half's hands. The scrum half should stand with his forwards on his right.

The law states that:

- The scrum half must stand one meter from the scrummage
- The ball must be held between knee and ankle .In releasing the ball there must be no feigning or dummy action
- The ball must touch the ground in the tunnel on a line midway through the tunnel

#### **4.4 The five-man scrum**

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Once the front row is confident with their binding and engagement sequence, the second row can be introduced.

##### **Role of the second row**

- To bind the front five together
- To transmit power (drive) through the front row

Forming a five man scrum

- Second row players bind strongly together
- Second row players' heads are placed between hooker's and props' hips and their shoulders below the props' buttocks
- Look up into the scrum - chin off chest
- Flatten out back and shoulders
- Aim to get point of outside shoulder in line with props' tailbone

The second row players do not exert any pressure onto the front row prior to contact. As the front row engages they follow the movement forward, thereby coming into a good pushing position.

#### **4.5 Second row binding**

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##### **Inexperienced players**

The second rows bind around each other strongly with the inside arm, and around the hips of the props. During the formation stage they have their inside knee touching the ground, with hips together and both knees flexed.

##### **Experienced players**

The second rows bind around each other strongly with the inside arm and through the props' legs, with the binding as close to their own ear as possible, with the elbow up and gripping the props' shorts, not shirts. During the formation stage they may have their inside knee touching the ground, with both knees flexed, or crouched with both knees off the ground.

## 4.6 The eight-man scrum

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Once the front five are confident with their binding and engagement sequence, the five-man scrum can be developed into the full eight-man scrum by introducing a Number Eight and two flankers.

### Role of the No.8

- To bind the two second rows together
- To transmit power (drive) through the second row
- To control the ball at the back of the scrum

### Role of the flankers

- To help keep the props straight
- To transmit power (drive) through the props
- To control the ball if hooked towards the side of the scrum

### The No.8

- Bind around the second rows' hips
- Look up into the scrum (keep the chin off the chest)
- Flatten out back and shoulders

### Flanker

- Bind over the backs of the second rows
- Push with the inside shoulder onto the props' buttocks
- Push at a slight angle

### Formation

- Fronts rows arms-length apart
- Feet shoulder-width apart
- Feet, hips and shoulders parallel
- Bind tightly
- Knees flexed
- Front row form first, followed by second row and finally back row

### Crouch and hold

- Knees slightly bent (sitting crouch)
- Upper body inclined from the hip
- Shoulders above hips
- Weight on balls of feet
- Balanced, awaiting next instruction from referee

### Touch (pause)

#### U-19 law variation- not applicable to the senior game

- Visualize the contact point (the space on your opponents' left) - 'sight the target'.
- Props touch opponent's shoulder / upper arm with outside arm / hand
- Chin off chest
- Hold for at least 2-3 seconds
- Hunch/ brace shoulders
- No pressure on front row from behind

**The pause is vital as it allows players to balance and sight their contact area.**

### Engage

- Look at contact point
- Engage with no charging
- Loose-head prop binds onto opposition tighthead and vice-versa
- Apply pressure on a horizontal plane only (slight upward movement may help this)
- Engage only on the referee's command and keep the movement forward with very short steps

**As from January 1, 2007 the IRB has directed all referees to form all scrums (irrespective of the age of the players) with a four-phase sequence: Crouch - Touch - Pause - Engage.**

### 4.7 The scrum in context

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It is important to link the activity with the rest of the game: what happens after the scrum?

The scrum is the first time that coaching specific positional skills becomes important. Ensure that players get opportunities to practice a range of positions to assist the development of their understanding of the game. Positions that require some individual coaching are:

- Prop - body position and role within the scrum
- Hooker - the strike
- Locks - body position and role within the scrum
- Scrum half - the put in and passing the ball from the base of the scrum
- Fly half - role as the first person to receive the ball from the scrum

When practicing the scrum, ensure the activity is interesting and in the context of the game by organizing sessions which require the players to play out their roles in the game. For example:

- Play a 10 v 10 game where every stoppage is restarted by a scrum, i.e. no lineouts, no penalties
- Play 12 v 6 games, starting from a scrum machine, with the opposition a mix of backs and forwards. (Note: when using a scrum machine ensure that it is set up for use with young players)