



CONTENTS

2 How To Introduce A Left and Right Defensive Pattern

By Glenn Bayliss ARL Level 3 Coach

6 Wet Weather Football

By Greg Platz

8 The Barbell Back Squat

By Alex Corvo

10 Attacking For A Result From Scrums

By Glenn Bayliss ARL Level 3 Coach

13 Shin Splints

By Dr Keith Woodhead

14 Strength Training, at what age and what type?

15 Kicking Out Of Own 20 Metres For Teams With Short Kicking Games

By Warren Smiles - Newcastle Knights Coaching & Development Manager

17 You Only Achieve What You Believe

20 What Is Different About A Final?

By the late Darrell Chapman - ARL Level 3 Coach



How To Introduce A Left And Right Defensive Pattern

By Glenn Bayliss ARL Level 3 Coach

How Does It Help?

Most teams playing rugby league at senior level have adopted a defensive pattern of “left and right centres”. It is the most prevalent pattern used by teams due to its ability to “slot” players into the defensive line allowing them to work with the same team mate, throughout most of the game. Another advantage is the reduced distance between players have to cover in a game. This can be a telling factor on a forward pack, as the

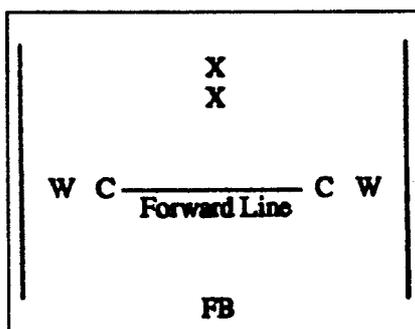
reduced travel and work in defence can transfer into less fatigue late in the game, i.e. a higher work capacity which results in increased attacking effort and probable less defensive errors.

When Do I Start?

Some coaches have started “left and right” defence with “Mod” teams. This seems a little early and a player’s first taste of “left and “right” should be left until players are introduced to international law i.e. under 13 years or 14 years rugby league. The introduction should be gradual, to allow the team time to become accustomed to the new ideas and discipline of patterns. The full system of “left and right” may take up to three years for players to fully understand before it can be successfully implemented.

Lock-In Centres

The first step is to “lock in” your two centres with their respective left or right winger.



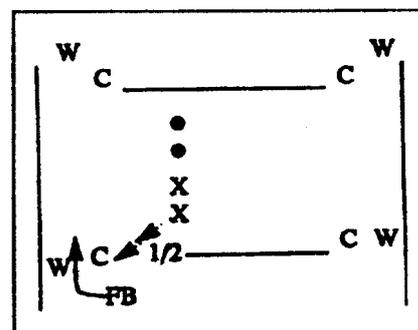
The winger and centre should then be able to develop an appreciation of each others defensive ability and gradually improve their on field communication.

The coach’s role is to ensure this “bond” between centre and wing occurs. All training drills should see these players paired up, even to the extent where “pairing” occurs during skill games. This allows players to become familiar with each others play and quirks. All training drills should emphasis communication in defence (and attack for that matter).

At this first stage we should begin to see the benefits of organised defence out wide and a reduced workload on your eight inside men.

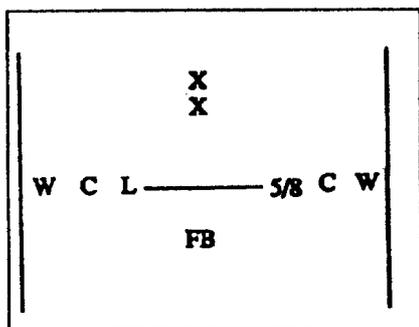
In attack it may be advisable to “lock in” your centres while in your own half. There are two definite advantages.

1. If you turn over the ball your defensive pattern is already “locked in”.
2. While working out of your half the team may be able to take advantage of “numbers” if your opponents drop back their wingers and/or half to ready themselves for a clearing kick.



Lock-In Five Eight and Lock

Five-eighths and locks are usually endowed with a fair turn of speed. These two players will now increase your “locked in” defence to six players.



By having a quick number count you can see that only six players, including the two markers do not have an assigned defensive position.

What is achieved is:

1. Having "pace" on both ends of our defensive line. This "athletic balance" will limit cases where a fast opponent competes against slower forwards.
2. Reducing, even further, the ground to be covered by the forwards, thus lessening the level of fatigue late in the game.

The coach must now ensure that a program of "communication" drills are included in the training schedule. This will become more important later with the "swing over". The "locked in" three players on the right and left sides should participate in drills as a unit so as to transfer training benefits into on field performance. Once again there are decided advantages in playing left and right in attack in your own half. As mentioned earlier, you are locked in and organised against a quick turnover of possession and you can take even greater advantage of numbers when opponents drop their wingers back in anticipation of a clearing kick.

Using Adjusters

("swing over")

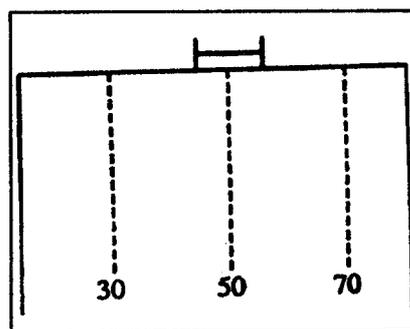
Once the team is confident in its ability to handle left and right "locked in" players, the team is now ready to advance to the next stage.

Adjusters help counter a good attacking team who attempt to move (our) players to one side of the field and then take advantage with their backline against slower men caught out wide.

Our "adjusters" normally the five-eighth or lock are now going to move or "adjust" their position in the defensive line to provide athletic balance to the area where the more dangerous opposition players are likely to attack.

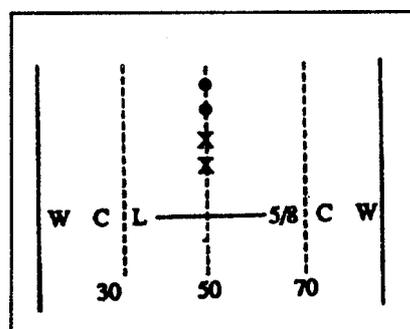
The coach must provide the two "adjusters" with cues for when to adjust.

These are usually imaginary lines running vertically down the field, from try line to try line, dividing the field into thirds.



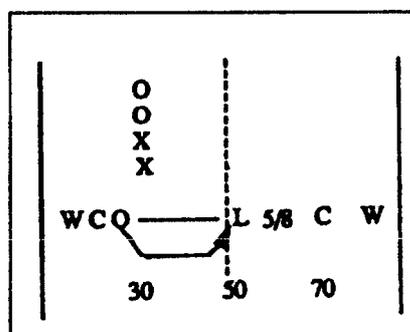
With these cues in place the following adjustments can be made.

1. Ball on 50 line.



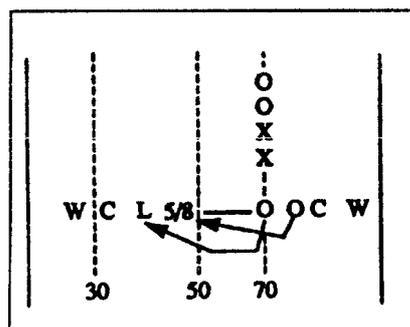
Lock and five-eighth are split on their respective sides.

2. Ball on 30 line.



When the ball hits the 30 line the lock adjusts to the open side to be the fourth man in. This allows "fast" men to counter the opponent's backline.

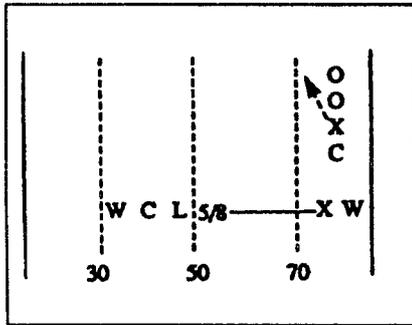
3. Ball on 70 line



If play returns back across field, first the lock adjusts back when opponents are tackled on the 50 line and the five-eighth “adjusts” to a position inside the lock when the opponents are tackled on the 30 line.

In other words the lock and five-eighth swing on the 30 or 70 lines, always swing to the inside and should not take position outside the 30 or 70.

4. Ball 80 line +

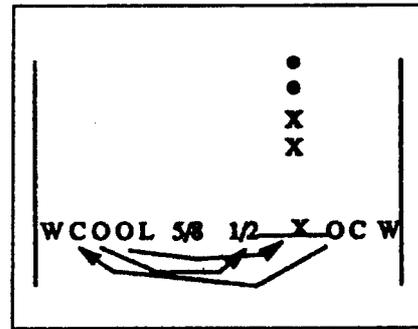
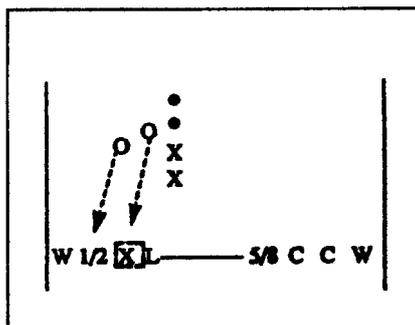
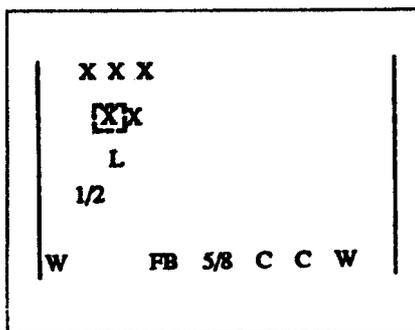


When the ball is close to a touch line the centre must become the non chasing marker. He holds the ruck area, trails inside chasing marker then retreats back into his assigned position.

Scrums

Scrums provide an instance where two defensive centres are forced together for the restart of play. It is essential to coach players how to organise and adjust into the left and right pattern over two or three rucks.

One simple option is to use the halfback and loose head side second rower as your “centre pairing” after the scrum breaks, until the respective centres can reclaim their left and right positions.



The Halfback

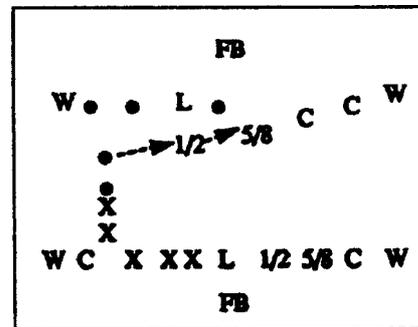
The halfback’s position is determined by the coach.

There are many different options, varying on the coaches tactical philosophy and the size, speed, athletic ability of the halfback.

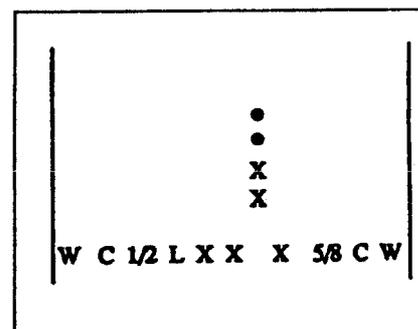
One option is to play your halfback in the line for the first three or four plays and then in cover for the late tackles.

His position in the line can vary.

a) He can adjust in the line to mark up on the opposition five-eighth. If the opposition are going to throw a back line play at you the ball will most likely go through the five-eighth.



b) If the halfback is a small player or is not a strong defender on bigger players he can fill in wider in the line during early tackles.



Wet Weather Football

By Greg Platz ex Queensland & Australian Representative

Wet weather doesn't occur to the extent that it is a regular feature. For this very reason a team should do some preparation in order to cope with such an eventuality. How would you be on knock out semi day, the ground is a bog and you haven't trained for it.

Just what does the coach do to help the team for that muddy or heavy ground.

Players and coaches alike need to be familiar with the effects of wet weather on our game and the tactics best employed under those conditions.

Wet weather affects play, players, playing equipment and the playing surface. It usually results in lower scores with reduced differential between teams. For this reason wet conditions are regarded as a levelling factor - detracting from the performances of good dry weather footballers yet enhancing the capabilities of less competent players.

The first thing to consider is how wet weather affects play. Some will dread the thought of going out to play in the mud and rain while others will relish the prospect. It is these willing players whom the coach should build his game plan around and use as an inspiration for the others to follow. Certain players styles are better suited to wet weather football. Often games in the wet become defence orientated with little scope for free running attack. In such conditions, the flamboyant attacking players may not be all that useful while those noted for their tackling and straight hard running come to the fore.

The pitch becomes the most transformed and influential factor in the wet weather computation. A wet playing surface means insecure footing.

When a players footing is insecure, evasive manoeuvres such as the side step, in and away, drawing the man and sudden changes in direction become anything from difficult to execute to relatively useless.

When the playing field is soft players should use longer studs than on a dry track. This will improve footing to some extent and may permit players to use their evasive skills. Another option is to direct play to the firmer areas of the field. Usually during games in the wet, the centre of the field becomes a bog, leaving corridors on either side in more reasonable order. Where possible, attacking raids should be directed along these corridors.

When you are playing in rain, muddy or heavy conditions, it doesn't take long for the ball to become both slippery and heavy. Although the use of synthetic fabric footballs has reduced this effect, a wet ball can not be passed as far, as quickly or as accurately; it can not be kicked as high or as long; and it becomes more difficult to catch. In wet conditions there will be significantly more spilled ball than in the dry. Ball security is vital in the wet and control requires a more conscious effort and, as a result more play is allowed. Teams should limit both the number and the distance passes are thrown. Passes, in general, should be kept short, with support close and deep - not shallow.

It is advisable to have players apply resin or a similar non-slip compound to their hands or guernseys where the ball is likely to make contact.

However, while the short pass is more prevalent, gaps will still present themselves out wide. It is reasonable to run the ball wide and pick up with a short pass, a deep, support runner coming straight. Stretching the ball across the field in this fashion can be productive. Running directly across is different from running "sideways" which simply makes an easier target of the runner.

RUCK PLAY ON WET AND HEAVY TRACKS DEMANDS THAT PLAYERS CROSS THE ADVANTAGE LINE.

A players speed and acceleration even in a straight line, is markedly reduced in the wet. The heavy going suggests that players need to keep moving, to maintain momentum to offset the increased inert load because of the conditions.

Wet weather football can be tiring and because ball movement is reduced the inside players will usually be called on to do disproportionate amount of work. Outside backs should be encouraged to take the occasional ruck to spread the work load more evenly.

The wet also introduces an unpredictable bounce of the ball. Low kicks "skid", high kicks tend to "flop". You might recollect Queensland won a State of Origin series because the ball failed to bounce in the mud when a goal line dropout was taken.

Those wet but firmer corridors mentioned earlier are perfect for low trajectory kicks when in the opposition half. The subsequent scrum, even with its predetermined result, is unlikely to produce any great threat because of the conditions, subsequent handling difficulties and distance between teams.

From your own half, aim the kicks towards the heavy parts of the ground, where the going is heavy work.

The net effect of all of this is a more cautious game played more slowly.

When a team receives the ball in their own half, it should be their express aim to get the football into opposition territory as soon as possible. As mentioned earlier, there is likely to be more dropped ball in the wet so the less time a team spends in their own territory the less chance there will be of handling errors and opportunity to the opposition. Use the minimum number of tackles necessary to position the kicker and chasers and return the ball to opposition territory.

For these reasons an important capability required of the team is for one or more players to have a good kicking game, preferably a long one.

Wet and heavy conditions and percentage football in an oppositions 35m area is a potent combination.

A team should now attack through their defence. An enthusiastic chase followed by aggressive, spoiling defence is likely to force errors during a team's attempt to carry the ball out of their own territory. Errors that now provide the defending team with possession in a field position that makes scoring easier. In this situation, it now becomes important to use the maximum number

of tackles in a set before kicking the ball high or along the ground to create scoring opportunities. This is "sweepstakes" football but chances are heavily weighted in favour of the team that controls possession near the opponents line. This also gives a side an advantage when penalties are awarded. A team is more likely to get more chance to kick for goal and, as points are hard to come by in the wet, it's advisable to attempt any within kicking range making certain the ball goes dead or is dropped in goal. I'm not advocating that kicking be the only try scoring option, but ball movement should be limited in favour of maintaining possession.

Defending for long periods in the wet will certainly tire an opposition.

In essence the objectives of wet weather football are

Meet the advantage line.

Play the game in the opposition half.

Pressure them in defence.

Feed off opposition mistakes.

Limit complex plays in preference for simple sweepstakes football.

Take points when offered.

In conclusion, remember there are degrees of wet weather. Some playing surfaces will become bog with relatively little rain while others will remain firm after twice the fall. It is up to the coach and players to decide just how much the wet conditions are likely to influence the teams normal play and adjust their strategies along the guidelines suggested.

NOTES

The Barbell Back Squat

By Alex Corvo

Strength training forms a very important part of the overall training program for the rugby league player. The “King” of all weight lifting exercises is the back squat, and exercise unparalleled in helping the development of the large muscle groups in the body’s “power” zones, the lower back, hips, buttocks and thighs. It is the muscles in these areas of the body that initiate many of the movements required in playing Rugby League.

When teaching the back squat to a beginner learning proper technique with very light resistance is very important to avoid injury and maximise development of strength once lifting loads have been increased. Training loads should not be increased until the proper squat technique has been mastered.

There are 2 distinct styles in performing the squat:

1. The “high bar” squat in which the bar sits across the shoulders and at the base of the neck.
2. The “low bar” or “power” squat in which the bar rests 4-5cm below the top of the shoulders.

The main difference between the styles is in the different stresses placed on the working muscles and in the mechanical leverage affected by the bar’s resting position.

In the power squat (using the lower bar position) heavier loads can be lifted due to better leverage. For beginners it is recommended that they commence their learning of the squat using the high bar position as this technique allows a higher torso position and assists in keeping the hips below the bar when performing the lift.

Teaching the squat is best done by breaking the movement into its 3 components:

**The Ready Position,
The Descent,
The Ascent**

The squat exercise will give the strength base needed for more advanced forms of speed/strength training.

READY POSITION

- Hands placed evenly on bar using slightly wider than shoulder width grip with thumbs around bar.
- Upper back placed in centre of bar with bar resting across back of shoulders.
- Chest up and out, shoulder blades pulled together.
- Feet positioned shoulder width or wider apart with toes pointed out slightly.
- Feet remain flat on floor.
- Head faces straight forward throughout the movement.

DESCENT

- Commence by “sitting back” and initiating movement at the hips first and then the knees.
- Keep body weight over the middle of the feet or heels.
- Knee bend and stay over toes.
- Descend in a controlled manner until tops of thighs are parallel to floor.

Attacking For A Result From Scrums

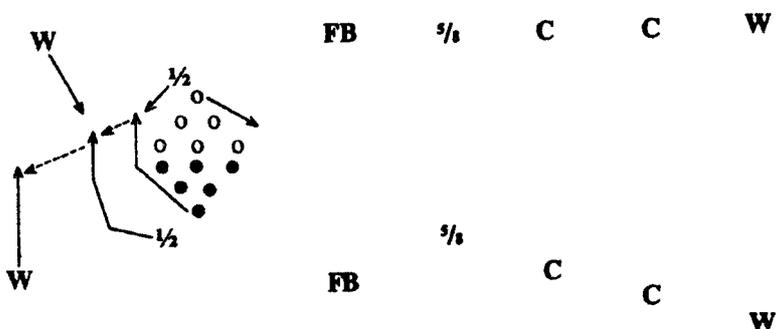
By Glenn Bayliss - ARL Level 3 Coach

Many teams restrict their ability to score points by being “over regimented” in their game plan or pattern of play. Remember that players not “plays” score more tries. If a coach allows his team to “back themselves” when they identify a weak point in the opposition he will help to develop a team that is far more dangerous in attack.

To allow players to recognise where to attack for the best result it is important to provide the “cues” in related practices during your team training sessions. Coaching your players to recognise these situations will accelerate the learning that comes with experience.

FULLBACK ON LONG SIDE FROM SCRUM

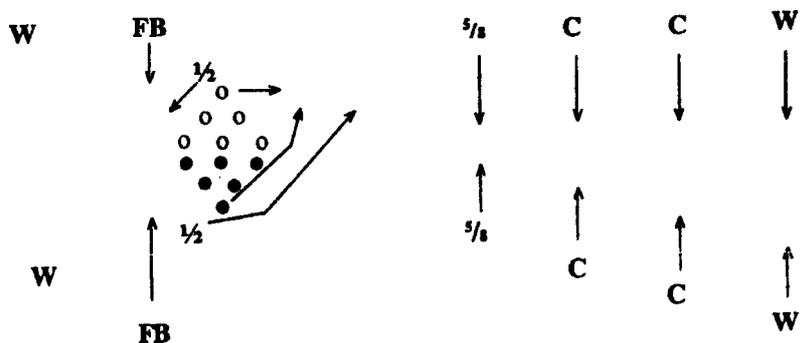
When the fullback stands on the “long side” to mark his opposition fullback the opportunity exists to exploit the short side.



When the ball is clear the lock picks up the ball and “scoots” down the short side with halfback and winger in support. The lock “draws” the opposition halfback before passing to his halfback. This should now give us a “two on one” game with the halfbacks decision to run or pass dependant on the opposition winger’s action.

FORCING THE FIVE-EIGHTH WIDE

Coaches often tell their players to “mark up” on their opponent’s outside shoulder, or straighten, in defence. You can use this to your advantage, if you have a speedy half, by standing your 5/8 extra wide forcing the defending 5/8 wide.

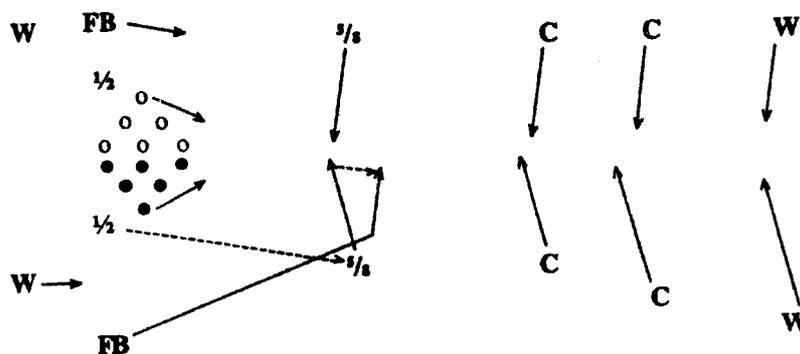


As with the previous situations it can be a decided advantage if you “control” the scrum and “screw” it to put the opposition lock in a more difficult position to fulfil his defensive assignment.

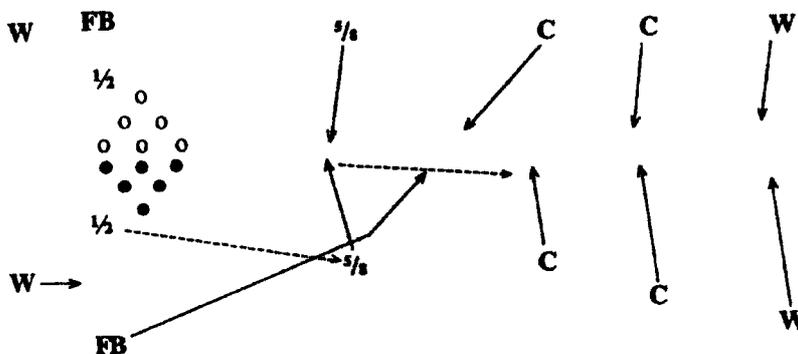
With the 5/8 standing wide the gap created may be enough for a “quick half” to penetrate the line. The inside support of the lock will negate the quick-breaking defensive lock and the decoy run by the fullback on the short side should account for the defensive fullback.

FULLBACK ON SHORT SIDE FROM SCRUM

When the fullback stands on the “short side” a number of attacking opportunities arise on the “long side” of the field.



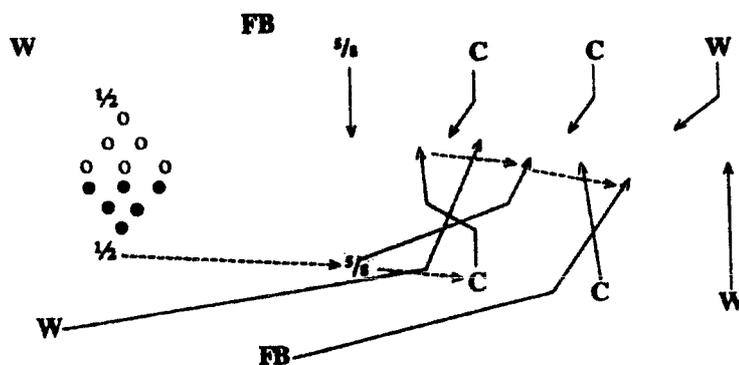
The fullback supports the 5/8 off his outside shoulder after the 5/8 angles in to draw his opposition 5/8. If the opposition centre stays with his man a “gap” is created for the fullback. The short side winger “covers” for the fullback.



The fullback supports the 5/8 off his outside shoulder. If the opposition centre drifts in to claim the fullback the 5/8 “face passes” the ball across to his unmarked centre. This will give you a 2 on 3 out wide. Once again the short side wingers covers for the fullback.

UMBRELLA (UP AND IN DEFENCE)

A team employing Up and In will try to “shut you down” as early as possible. This requires quick decisions on who they are numbered off with. By throwing some decoy runners at their line you can cause problems out wide.

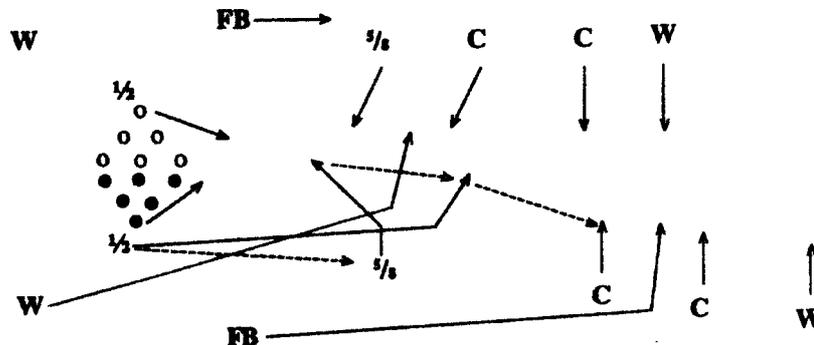


The halfback passes to the 5/8 who quickly passes on to the centre. The centre drifts in pulling his opposition centre in to him. The ball is passed behind the decoy runner i.e. “tail ball” to the 5/8 who has wrapped around. The 5/8 can then pass to the outside centre or use him as a decoy and feed the fullback entering the line. This will depend on the actions of the wide defenders.

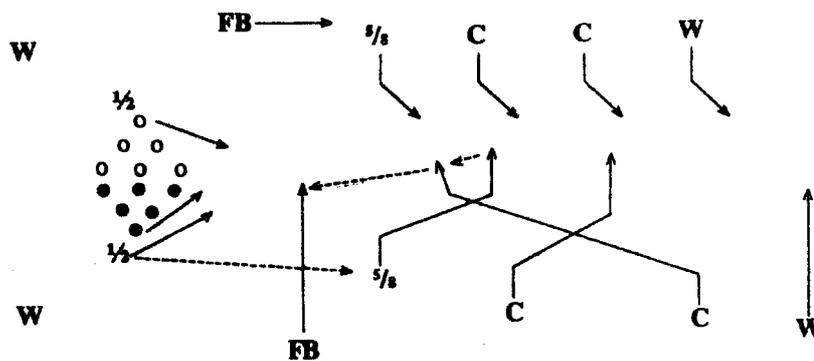
SHORT LINE (COMPRESSED DEFENCE)

Sides with compressed defence usually employ a “sliding” system. To attack teams using this defence you have to take advantage of the space out wide after “straightening” their defence by stopping the “slide”.

Another option is changing your “angle of attack” catching a player on the “wrong foot” or exploiting the inside player not “trailing”.



The halfback passes to the 5/8, who arcs back in, drawing his opposition 5/8 in, along with the lock breaking from the scrum. The winger wraps around off the 5/8's shoulder as a decoy to attract the opposition centre. The halfback also wraps and receives the pass to initiate a “second phase” backline attack against a defence that has been forced to straighten and now is being faced by greater number around the ball out wide.



The halfback passes to the 5/8 who drifts wider with his supporting centre to accentuate the “slide” of the defending team. The outside centre angles back in to receive a reverse pass from the 5/8. If the defence inside from the scrum is slow, space may be available for the centre or supporting fullback.

SUMMARY

If your players realise the vast array of attacking possibilities that arise from a scrum and can choose the right option, for the right situation, you enhance your attacking potency.

Putting players in “game like” situations at training and exploring attacking possibilities help them to recognise situations and where to attack for the best result.

You don't need to be “over complicated” but follow these simple guidelines.

- 1. The more players in motion the greater the pressure on defence.**
- 2. Limit your number of passes.**
- 3. Make use of decoy runners.**
- 4. Use a player twice i.e. pass and wrap**
- 5. Use your fullback and shortside winger.**
- 6. Hit the line with pace.**

Scrum is an ideal opportunity to attack. Make sure that your team is aware of this and always attack for the best result.

Shin Splints

By Dr Keith Woodhead

With the off season, most footballers will be doing some road work with long runs of 40-80 minutes to improve cardiovascular (heart-lung) fitness. SHIN SPLINTS is one problem that can be associated with distance running. Unfortunately there is no substitute for distance running if a footballer wants to improve cardiovascular fitness.

SHIN SPLINTS is pain that is felt in the lower leg bone, usually in the middle to lower part of the leg bone (TIBIA). There are two bones in the lower leg, the TIBIA and FIBULA. The tibia is the bone involved in shin splints. There is often an area of tenderness about 3 to 6cm long over the lower part of the inside edge of the tibia. The pain often starts during training and as the condition becomes worse pain is present during non training activities to the stage where walking may cause pain.

The pain of shin splints is very real but the exact cause of shin splints is uncertain. The pain is probably due to damage to the tibia where the leg muscles attach to and are anchored to the bone. Usually the condition is brought on by one or all of the following:-

Increasing the distance run in a relatively short time. For example going from 8km a day to 10 or 12km a day.

Footwear that does not have good shock absorbent qualities. The continuing pounding on a hard surface can cause shin splints.

Change of training surface from say a grass surface to running on footpaths or roads.

Abnormality of the shape of the foot and the way in which the foot strikes the ground during running.

Treatment of Shin Splints

Anti-inflammatory medication will help reduce the pain as will ICE massage and packs. Change in training venue from road to a softer surface or swimming will maintain fitness already achieved while the condition heals. Attention to footwear with arch support and better cushioning in the heel will help. An orthotic support made by a podiatrist may be necessary. Some sufferers will need complete rest from all training

involving the legs for some weeks and then a gradual return to training with emphasis on increasing the training load.

PREVENTION is aimed at bearing in mind the above factors when the coach wants his team members to start long distance running. There are other causes of lower leg pain that can be very similar to shin splints and must be ruled out before a confident diagnosis of shin splints can be made. These conditions are:-

1. Stress fracture of the tibia.
2. Inflammation of the soft tissues of the lower leg.
3. Compartment Syndrome. This is uncommon and is caused by increased pressure within the leg muscles so that blood does not flow into the muscles during exercise.

Stretching of the Archilles tendon and hamstrings will increase flexibility and spread the impact so that more shock is absorbed further up the leg.

Doing a bone scan rather than conventional x-rays is the best way to decide whether the problem of the lower leg pain is a stress fracture of shin splints.



Strength training, at what age and what type?

Generally, researchers agree that children who have not yet reached puberty may, providing certain guidelines are followed, safely engage in strength training. Most children will reach puberty between 11 and 13 years of age. However, the use of free weights is not advised for the beginner until a basic level of strength and understanding of technique is established.

It is generally recommended that free weights are not used as a training aid before 15 years of age, taking into account the skeletal age (bone development) of the individual.

When a player is first introduced to training with free weights it is vital that time is invested toward learning correct technique. This is best done using little resistance and with correct supervision.

However, bodyweight exercises could be used by coaches beginning at the Mini-Mod age groups. Strength gains will occur with the use of bodyweight exercises such as chin ups, push ups, sit ups and dips. A training partner could also be used as resistance i.e. in doing squats.

The benefit of “bodyweight” exercises are threefold. Firstly the risk of injury to the player is very minimal, the increases in strength are good, and thirdly there is very little, if any, cost involved in their execution.

Circuit training which should consist of light weights and high repetitions, is an excellent way of introducing players to weight training with no great risk of injury. It is an excellent means of working aerobic and muscular endurance for the players.

It is the responsibility of coaches to keep pace with the games advances. A good coach needs to educate his players on the benefits of progressive training techniques and program them into the teams training schedule.

Examples of Bodyweight Exercise Routines

1. Set Intervals

Coaches of Mini and Mod would be advised to modify the routines below. Decrease the workload by half e.g. 4 sets of 10 repetitions would change to 2 sets of 5 repetitions.

4x20 Push Ups

4x8 Chin Ups

3x20 Squats

3x10 Dips

3x30 Sit Ups

2. Pyramid Sets

Ideally, “pyramid” work is characterised by high repetitions with low weights progressing to heavy weights with less repetitions.

10-20-30-20-10 Push Ups

10-20-30-20-10 Sits Ups

5-8-10-8-5 Chin Ups

5-8-10-8-5 Dips

10-15-20-15-10 Squats

NOTES

Kicking Out Of Own 20 Metres For Teams With Short Kicking Games

By Warren Smiles, Newcastle Knights Coaching & Development Manager

Not every Rugby League team has available to them a long kicker of the football e.g. Brad Fittler. Imagine having a short range kicker and being required to kick out of your 20 metre zone. What should you, as a coach consider. This issue needs to be addressed like any other tactical problem.

Let us first look at what type of kicks may be best for the team to use.

1. Torpedo punt.
2. Conventional punt.

The Torpedo Punt

The torpedo punt, is one of the kicks to use to gain maximum distance for the short range kicking team. However, it is a difficult kick and requires plenty of practice particularly by the younger player. Its effectiveness far outweighs the cost in practice time and it must be mastered.

The Conventional Punt

The conventional punt is also an ideal kick to be used for the short range kicking team. The ball is held as for passing or in a way that is comfortable for the kicker. The idea is to kick the ball on the back quadrant and with a low trajectory so that the ball on contact with the ground will roll on, gaining those valuable extra metres that were not obtained in flight. Also, with the ball rolling it makes it awkward for the opposing fullback or winger to pick it up, giving the chase team more time to get down field to defend the return.

To gain the full advantage from the kick the team must have a good platform from which to work. This would include (i) maximum metres forward (ii) speed of the play-the-ball (iii) field position (iv) protection for the kicker (v) the chase team; and (vi) good defence.

- (i) **Maximum metres forward** from the ruck play is essential as this compensates for the lack of length with the kick. This can be gained by runners hitting the advantage line, receiving a flat pass from the acting-half.

When in your own 20 metre zone wingers and speed

men should take pressure off the forwards by running from dummy-half. Runners in motion on the other side of the ruck or crossing the ruck as decoys can help the speed men get away from dummy-half and gain ground. The team should use the 5 tackles to maximise the metres gained before kicking.

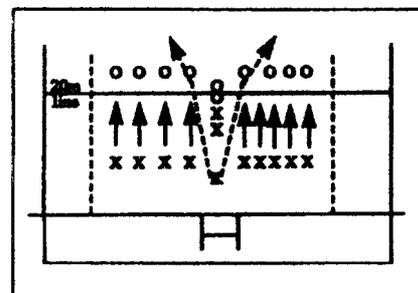
- (ii) **Speed of the Play-The-Ball (P.T.B.)** is important to keep the defence moving back and give your runners more room and possibly catch the opposition off side.

Therefore, as you progress through your tackles when setting for a kick the runner on the last “go forward” before the kick should be one of the quicker players giving the opposition limited time to get set to come forward and harass your kicker. Keep them going back to help the kicker.

Coaches should be aware that an effective kicking game is becoming more important in the modern game and cannot be ignored.

- (iii) **Field Position** is a matter of preference. The team needs to work to set a field position for a kick. One option is to work to the centre of the field for a left or right side kick choice.

The centre field shortens the kick and allows the attack to play the centre of the field. It opens up flanks on either side and can shorten the chasing forward line.



Chase team should move in straight line on field

- (iv) **Protection for Kicker.** Without deliberate obstruction, players from the kicking team need

to place themselves in front of the kicker to cover him from the defence, especially the markers.

Kickers should be as flat as possible and on each side of the ruck. The ruck half provides a third alternative but should kick on four.

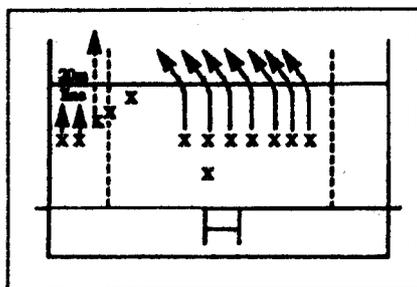
Because of the short range, the kicker should chase to take away that 10 metres between the receiver and off-side chases.

(v) **The Chase.** All members of the team need to be made aware of their job in chasing a kick and that without a good chase a kick is useless. Because of the lack of distance in the kick, chasers must sprint to ensure that the receiver has no distance to advance.

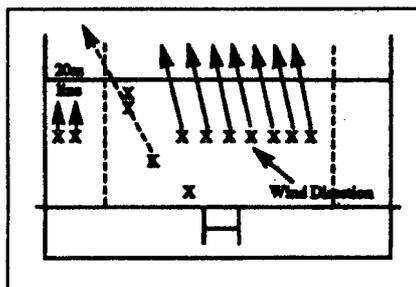
For kicks along the touchline, left and right wing pairings should use their pace to chase and be first to the receiver.

(vi) **Good Defence.** Having now gained a minimum distance priority is to keep the ground. This is accomplished through a strong forward defence. Now is the time to deny the new attack any ground.

Kicking down one sideline looking to pin the opposition towards that sideline and allowing the defence to form an umbrella type pattern seems a sound choice.



One other main influence would be a cross wind. In this case the team would work the ball toward the sideline from which the wind is blowing and use the wind to gain maximum advantage by kicking towards the corner.



Have straight line defence moving down open side of field as chase team.

A team is severely disadvantaged with a short range kicking game and to compensate must work at a whole series of team manoeuvres to produce the best possible advantage.

- Accent on quick rolling rucks.
- Last runner sharp.
- Flat positional kickers either side of the ruck.
- Low trajectory kick.
- Sprint chase and umbrella the defence.
- Defend, defend and DEFEND.

Coaches should be aware that an effective kicking game is becoming more and more important in the modern game and cannot be ignored. It means working especially with your chosen kickers and increasing their repertoire of kicks while progressing the amount of pressure and their ability to perform under that pressure. Remembering not to ignore the role of the rest of the team if the kick is to be effective.



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The stress involved in a Rugby League game can cause players to react both physically and mentally in a manner which can negatively affect their performance. They may become tense, their heart rates race, they break into a cold sweat, they worry about the outcome of the game, they find it hard to concentrate on the task at hand. This has led coaches to take an increasing interest in the field of sport psychology and in particular in the area of stress control. That interest has focused on techniques which players can use in the game situation to maintain control and optimise their performance. Once learned, these techniques allow the player to relax and focus their attention in a positive manner on the task of preparing for and participation in the game.

Relaxation Training

There are a number of relaxation techniques which have the following characteristics:

- procedures for first recognising and then releasing tension in muscles
- concentration of breathing control and regulation
- concentration of sensations such as heaviness, warmth
- mental imagery

Regardless of which technique is used, the following two conditions need to exist if the technique is to be learned:

- the player must believe that relaxation will help
- a quiet, dimly lit and warm room which is free from interruption

Meditation for Relaxation

A number of sports psychologists believe that meditation can be useful in achieving maximum performance from a player. Engaging in meditation helps reduce stress before an event and with experience the player can learn to relax different muscle groups and appreciate subtle differences in muscle tension. The technique includes the following steps:

“I never hit a shot even in practice without having a sharp in-focus picture of it in my head.”

Golfing Great, Jack Nicklaus

- Lie down quietly on your back in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
- Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing to your face.
- Breathe through your nose and become aware of your breathing. As you breathe out, say the word “one” silently to yourself. For example, breathe in...out, “one”; in...out, “one”; and so on. Continue for 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, lie quietly for several minutes at first with closed eyes and later with opened eyes.

Maintain a passive attitude, permit relaxation to occur at its own pace and expect other thoughts. When distracting thoughts occur return your concentration back to your breathing. Try to practice the technique once a day.

How Do I Achieve Relaxed Muscles?

Progressive muscular relaxation involves the active contracting and relaxing of muscles. When a muscle is tightened for 4-6 seconds and then relaxed, the muscle returns to a more relaxed state. This process

should be performed for the following parts of the body starting from the feet and progressively working up, legs, thighs, buttocks, stomach, back, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, jaw, face and eyes.

How Will Relaxed Muscles Feel?

In the 1930's it was noticed that patients in a relaxed state experienced one of two sensations: the feeling of warmth or the feeling of heaviness in completely relaxed limbs. During the relaxation process concentration should be focused on one of these sensations. For the first few sessions the player should alternate the focus between sessions to determine which one they prefer.

Can Relaxation Have a Negative Effect?

In competition situation a player will either be:

- **Under-excited;** low in arousal; find it hard to "get up" for the game; disinterested; etc
- **Over-excited;** high in arousal; over the top; nervous-anxious; scared of the competition; sick with worry; etc
- **Optimally-excited;** nervous but in control; looking forward to the game but apprehensive; thinking positively; feeling good; etc.

If we were to use relaxation procedures with an over excited player, we might be able to reduce their arousal level to that of the optimally excited player. This would have a positive effect on performance. However if we asked an under-excited player to use relaxation procedures it would only make it harder to "get-up" for the competition. Coaches therefore have to know their players and how they react in game situations.

What is Mental Imagery?

Mental imagery involves the player imagining themselves in a specific environment or performing a specific activity. These images should have the player performing these items very well and successfully. They should see themselves enjoying the activity and feeling satisfied with their performance. They should attempt to enter fully into the image with all their senses. See, hear, feel, touch, smell and perform as they would like to perform in real life. A player in a fully relaxed state, is particularly receptive to mental imagery.

What Can Mental Imagery Be Used For?

Mental Imagery can be used:

- **To see success.** Many players "see" themselves achieving their goals on a regular basis, both performing skills at a high level and seeing the desired performance outcomes.

- **To motivate.** Before or during training sessions, calling up images of your goals for that session, or of a past or future competition or opposition player can serve a motivational purpose. It can vividly remind you of your objective, which can result in increased intensity in training.

- **To perfect skills.** Mental imagery is often used to facilitate the learning and refinement of skills or skill sequences. The best players "see" and "feel" themselves performing perfect skills, programs, routines, or plays on a very regular basis.

- **To familiarise.** Mental imagery can be effectively used to familiarize yourself with all kinds of things, such as a football ground or stadium, a complex play or routine, a pre-game plan, a game plan, a media interview plan, a refocusing plan or the strategy you plan to follow.

- **To set the stage for performance.** Mental imagery is often an integral part of the pre-game plan, which helps set the mental stage for a good performance. Players do a complete mental run through of the key elements of their performance. This helps draw out their desired pre-game feeling and focus. It also helps keep negative thoughts from interfering with a positive pre-game focus.

- **To focus.** Mental imagery can be useful in helping you to re-focus when the need arises. For example, if a warm up is feeling sluggish, imagery of a previous best performance or previous best game focus can help get things back on track. You can also use imagery as a means of refocusing within the game by imagining what you should focus on and feeling that focus.

How Do I Apply Mental Imagery?

Golfing great Jack Nicklaus used mental imagery. In describing how he images his performance, he wrote:

"I never hit a shot even in practice without having a sharp in-focus picture of it in my head. It's like a colour movie. First, I "see" the ball where I want to finish, nice and white and sitting up high on the bright green grass. Then the scene quickly changes, and I "see" the ball going there: its path, trajectory, and shape, even its behaviour on landing. Then there's a sort of fade-out, and the next scene shows me making the kind of swing that will turn the previous images into reality. Only at the end of this short private Hollywood spectacular do I select a club and step up to the ball."

What Is Different About A Final?

By the late Darrel Chapman, Level 3 Coach

former Association Professor, Centre for Sport and Exercise Science (U.N.E.) (Northern Rivers)

At the end of winter many players and clubs steel themselves for what is considered the gruelling element of the season - the semi-finals, finals and hopefully the grand final. Now with this part of the season well and truly over, coaches, players and club management have time to reflect and consider the effect of, and how they coped with that “gruelling element of the season”-finals.

Unfortunately for a large number of players and teams, the competitive environment is perceived as being different, even though the same people are expected to perform the same skills. The problem is that the environment changes, tension exists and doubts about performance ability change. Or does the environment change? Maybe the team environment is the same; but the player or team cause the changes to occur. But, does it really change, or is it merely a mind change?

There is a great movie called “Hoosiers” with Gene Hackman about a small time High School Basketball Team that makes it to the big game. The coach (Gene Hackman) is very aware of the anxiety levels of the team and is conscious of the need to put their minds back on the task. So he takes them into the awesome new stadium well before the game and asks them to measure the court. He then draws their attention to the fact the court is no different to the one back home or to the many others on which they have played. The court has not changed, the game has not changed, the task is still the same.

Too often, we use information which is not relevant to performance. The difference between performing against weak opposition, strong opposition, a normal fixture or a grand final is not relevant to actual performance. The only way it can affect performance is if the individual player allows it to do so.

Another situation which clearly demonstrates this problem is the example of walking along a beam, which is about 20 centimetres wide.

Place the beam on the ground and it becomes a relatively simple task to walk from one end to the other. As the height of the beam increases from ground level the task becomes more difficult.

Why?

The answer is similar to the answer Gene Hackman anticipated.

Extra information which the player is not used to experiencing is presented. The task is the same, but the surrounding information is different. Using both examples, the individual is prone to taking in a great deal of extra information which is not necessarily relevant to the task.

The irrelevant information causes confusion and increases the arousal level of the performer and subsequently acts as a distractor to the performance of the task.

Players have three major areas over which they need to take control. This is of course depending on the objectives of the player - “am I aiming at high performance? Recreational activity? Or a blending of both?

The three areas are:

Skill

What is the level of skill? Is it adequate to perform to my expectation? If the level of skill is not at the objective standard necessary, then the player is quite likely to doubt performance capacity. If this is the case, the ability to perform well under the “assumed pressure” in a different environment such as a grand final cannot be predicted.

Fitness

Does the player have the strength, endurance, speed and other physical capacities to repeat all the skills when required? If not, then the player is likely to reduce involvement and not totally commit to the tasks at hand. If the appropriate level of fitness is not there, the player may not have the commitment necessary.

Environment

What is the difference between a training session, a normal fixture and grand final?

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